

NIGER

Attacks on education and military use in Niger continued in the 2020-2021 period, particularly in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions. Various non-state armed groups reportedly threatened schools and teachers, and burned and looted schools in over 60 incidents. Diffa region experienced sporadic attacks during the reporting period.

Context

The security situation deteriorated in Niger during the 2020-2021 reporting period. Nigerien Armed Forces confronted armed groups in the western Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, as well as in the eastern Diffa region, and faced growing insecurity in the southeastern Maradi region, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).¹¹⁶⁰

The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and other IS affiliates, armed groups affiliated with Al Qaeda, Boko Haram affiliated or splinter groups, self-defense groups, and Niger's military fought each other and attacked civilians during the reporting period.¹¹⁶¹ Violence increased in 2021, when ACLED recorded the highest number of civilian fatalities since it began collecting data in Niger.¹¹⁶² Following run-off presidential elections in February 2021,¹¹⁶³ Mohamed Bazoum of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism was elected and peacefully took power.¹¹⁶⁴

In Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, ISGS, which the International Crisis Group called Niger's "most potent security threat," increased its activity in 2020 and 2021.¹¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch documented that armed groups, in particular IS affiliates, killed 420 people in 2021.¹¹⁶⁶ In addition, the military was implicated in violence against civilians, including forcibly disappearing at least 115 men during a security operation in Tillabéri region in March and April 2020, according to Amnesty International.¹¹⁶⁷

During the reporting period, violence perpetrated by Boko Haram and affiliated or splinter groups continued to affect civilians in Diffa region.¹¹⁶⁸ On December 12, 2020, Niger also experienced one of its most deadly attacks by Boko Haram, in Toumour village, Diffa region.¹¹⁶⁹ The attack killed at least 28 civilians and injured 100 others and led to the destruction of at least 800 homes.¹¹⁷⁰

Niger's humanitarian situation further deteriorated during the reporting period, due to climatic shocks, Covid-19, and conflict.¹¹⁷¹ In the second half of 2021, OCHA reported that over 3.8 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance.¹¹⁷² In 2020 and 2021, around 530,000 people were internally displaced, refugees or returnees, an increase of 21 percent in comparison to 2019.¹¹⁷³ Insecurity prevented the provision of necessary assistance to communities during the reporting period.¹¹⁷⁴

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted education in Niger during the reporting period, when schools were closed for more than three months in 2020, affecting at least 3.5 million children's access to education, on top of 2.5 million children who were already out of school.¹¹⁷⁵ In addition, during the 2020-2021 school year, insecurity forced 377 schools to close, affecting over 34,400 students.¹¹⁷⁶ By the end of 2021, the UN estimated that 579 schools were closed in Tillabéri region, or 24 percent of all schools in the region, affecting 53,562 children.¹¹⁷⁷ Fires of unknown cause affected 89 schools across the country between April and November 2021, including two that killed at least 45 primary and pre-school children in total.

Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified over 40 reported incidents of attacks on schools in Niger. In most reports, non-state armed groups set fire to schools or threatened to attack schools, with Tillabéri region most affected. Attacks on schools occurred at a similar rate to earlier years, but with a slight decline. In 2019, for example, the UN reported over 43 reported incidents of attacks on schools in Niger, and GCPEA identified around 20 reported incidents of attacks on schools in 2018.¹¹⁷⁸ The decline in 2020 may be due either to fewer attacks while schools were shut due to Covid-19, or to fewer monitors in the field due to public health restrictions.¹¹⁷⁹

In 2020, the UN recorded 29 attacks on schools in Niger.¹¹⁸⁰ In the same year, GCPEA identified at least 20 reports of attacks on schools from UN, media, and NGO sources, the majority of which took place in Tillabéri region, although GCPEA

was unable to determine which of these overlapped with the UN's count;¹¹⁸¹ the collated reports involved arson (14), threats (2), and looting (2), and all were suspected to have been perpetrated by non-state armed groups. Examples included:

- Between February 10 and 13, 2020, armed groups burned three schools in Famale, Sakoira, and Taroum, Tillabéri region, according to the UN and ACLED.¹¹⁸²
- The UN and ACLED reported that on the night of May 13, 2020, an unidentified armed group burned down classrooms in Tolba village, Torodi commune, Tillabéri region. The attack occurred the day after officials announced the reopening of schools in June following two months of Covid-19-related closures.¹¹⁸³
- In June 2020, unidentified armed assailants set fire to two schools in Tera and Djagourou communes, Tillabéri region, as reported by the Niger Protection Cluster. Community members also reported that government officials had been inside the schools during a political visit to the area prior to the attack.¹¹⁸⁴
- In December 2020, armed men on motorbikes threatened to force the closure of all the schools in Inelou, near Tebaram, Tahoua region, according to the Niger Protection Cluster. Following the attack, the teachers fled the area.¹¹⁸⁵

In 2021, GCPEA identified at least 11 reported incidents of attacks on schools in Niger.¹¹⁸⁶ In addition, in February 2021, the Protection Cluster reported that 36 schools had closed due to threats by armed groups in Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, although the Cluster did not specify the month and year that the threats took place.¹¹⁸⁷ Examples of reported incidents included:

- In January 2021, armed assailants allegedly tore down a Nigerien flag from a school and destroyed documents in directors' offices in four schools (Innaridan, Adidan, Innoussoukou, and Dogondagi) in Takanamatt commune, Tahoua region. The attackers also directly threatened teachers (reported below), as reported by the Niger Protection Cluster.¹¹⁸⁸
- On March 24, 2021, armed assailants attacked three villages in Anzarou commune, Tillabéri region. The attackers allegedly burnt down two schools, in addition to killing at least 11 civilians, looting a health center, and stealing livestock, as reported by *Agence France Presse* and Amnesty International.¹¹⁸⁹
- On November 11, 2021, a non-state armed group allegedly burned a school in Ouro Djaladjo, Tillabéri region, after they had reportedly preached to the village.¹¹⁹⁰
- On November 12, 2021, a non-state armed group allegedly attacked a school in Adaré, Torodi commune, Tillabéri region, and destroyed learning materials, furniture, and parts of the school building. This attack led to the closure of 13 schools in the area.¹¹⁹¹

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified at least 17 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel, from media, NGO, and UN sources. As in earlier years, armed groups threatened, abducted, killed, or otherwise injured students. In 2019, GCPEA identified five incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, or other education personnel, in Tillabéri and in Niamey, which included one incident of police using excessive force against student protesters.¹¹⁹² In 2018, GCPEA identified four incidents of attacks on teachers in Diffa region, and one in Tillabéri.¹¹⁹³ The data indicates two opposing trends: a rise in attacks in Niger's western regions and a decline in Diffa region.

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least ten reported incidents of attacks on school students and educators.¹¹⁹⁴ Of these, five occurred in Tahoua region, three in Tillabéri region, and one each in Agadez and Diffa regions. For example:

- In January 2020, the Niger Protection Cluster reported that armed groups threatened teachers in five villages in Tillia commune, Tahoua region, ordering teachers to close all schools in the area and to leave the schools before the armed groups returned. After the threat, three schools in Agando, Assagaygay, and Chinzigaran villages officially closed, and teachers fled from two schools in Eknewane and Tabatol, causing the schools to stop operating.¹¹⁹⁵

- The UN and ACLED reported that members of an armed group shot and injured two teachers in Dessa, Female commune, Tillabéri region, on February 7, 2020.¹¹⁹⁶
- On an unspecified date between April and May 2020, members of a non-state armed group attacked the director of a school in Bolso, Torodi commune, Tillabéri region, according to the Danish Refugee Council. The director sustained injuries, and the attack caused local authorities to close surrounding schools.¹¹⁹⁷

In 2021, GCPEA identified at least seven reported incidents of attacks on school teachers in Niger.¹¹⁹⁸ GCPEA also received qualitative information that armed groups threatened teachers in Tillabéri and Tahoua, causing teachers to flee or stop working.¹¹⁹⁹ Examples included:

- On January 7, 2021, armed groups threatened teachers in four separate schools in Dargol commune, Tillabéri region, according to the UN. The schools subsequently closed.¹²⁰⁰
- The Protection Cluster reported that in January 2021, armed assailants threatened to kill teachers if they returned to work at four schools in Takanamatt commune, Tahoua region. After making threats, they then attacked the schools, as reported above.¹²⁰¹

Military use of schools and universities

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified isolated reports of the military use of schools in Niger. During the previous reporting period, GCPEA received anecdotal evidence, as well as at least one report in 2018, that state armed forces had used schools as campsites in villages across Tillabéri region.¹²⁰²

In 2020, GCPEA identified one report of the use of a school by state armed forces in Tankama village, Tibiri commune, Maradi region, in November 2020. The school closed as a result of the use of the facility, according to the UN.¹²⁰³ Following advocacy efforts by the UN, state armed forces departed, allowing for the resumption of classes in this school in January 2021.¹²⁰⁴

¹¹⁶⁰ Hénri Nsaibia, “The Sahel: Insurgency and fragile politics at the center of an unabated crisis,” in Elliot Baynum, Roudabeh Kishi, Sogand Afkari, and Sam Jones (eds), *Ten Conflicts to Worry About in 2021*, (Wisconsin: ACLED, February 2021), p. 34.

¹¹⁶¹ “Sahel: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Operations,” Human Rights Watch news release, February 13, 2021. International Crisis Group, “Murder in Tillabery: Calming Niger’s Emerging Communal Crisis,” ICG Briefing No. 172, May 28, 2021. International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, Niger, November 2021.

¹¹⁶² Hénri Nsaibia, “10 Conflicts to Worry About in 2022 - The Sahel - Persistent, expanding, and escalating instability.” Giacomo Zandonini, Tomas Stadius & Moussa Aksar, “What’s behind the rising violence in western Niger?,” *The New Humanitarian*, September 23, 2021.

¹¹⁶³ “Niger’s Mohamed Bazoum sworn in as president after failed coup,” *BBC News*, April 2, 2021. “Niger presidential election heads to February runoff,” *Aljazeera*, January 2, 2021.

¹¹⁶⁴ “Mohamed Bazoum declared Niger’s new president.” *Aljazeera*, February 23, 2021.

¹¹⁶⁵ “Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger’s Tillabery,” International Crisis Group, Report no. 289. June 3, 2020.

¹¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Niger: Surging Atrocities by Armed Islamist Groups,” Human Rights Watch News release, August 11, 2021.

¹¹⁶⁷ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2020/2021*.

¹¹⁶⁸ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, Niger, November 2021.

¹¹⁶⁹ *Reuters*, “Attack in Niger Kills 28, and Boko Haram Is Blamed,” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2020.

¹¹⁷⁰ “Niger: UN gravely concerned for safety of refugees, following Boko Haram attack,” *UN News*, December 15, 2020.

¹¹⁷¹ “Humanitarian Needs Overview Niger 2021 (Aperçu des Besoins Humanitaires Niger 2021),” OCHA, January 2021.

¹¹⁷² OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021: Niger*, (New York: OCHA, 2021).

¹¹⁷³ UNHCR, “Niger: Operational Update, November 2021,” December 31, 2021, p. 1.

¹¹⁷⁴ OCHA, “Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview: Sahel Crisis,” OCHA, April 2021, p. 22.

¹¹⁷⁵ Lalaina F. Andriamasinoro, “From COVID-19 vaccine to girls’ education,” UNICEF news release, September 2, 2021. “Niger : The Education System Confronts Covid (Niger : le système éducatif à l’épreuve du covid),” Agence Française de Développement (AFD), March 2, 2021. “Niger/Covid-19: the government calls for school closures for two weeks (Niger/Covid-19 : le gouvernement décide la fermeture des établissements scolaires durant deux semaines),” *Anadolu Agency*, December 12, 2020.

¹¹⁷⁶ Information received from an NGO respondent on July 22, 2021. Information from a UN respondent, received November 27, 2021.

¹¹⁷⁷ OCHA, “Niger Situation Report - Last updated: 20 December, 2021 (Niger Rapport de situation - Dernière mis à jour: 20 Décembre 2021)”.

- ¹¹⁷⁸ OCHA, “Niger Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020,” January 2020, p. 24. GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020*, pp. 181-184.
- ¹¹⁷⁹ Information received from an NGO correspondent on July 22, 2021.
- ¹¹⁸⁰ OCHA, “Humanitarian Needs Overview Niger 2021 (Aperçu des Besoins Humanitaires Niger 2021),” OCHA, January 2021, p. 17.
- ¹¹⁸¹ A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf
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- ¹¹⁸³ Whatsapp, as cited in ACLED, Event ID NIR1321 (data downloaded July 17, 2020). “Niger: Tillabéri region monthly report 1-31 May 2020 (Niger: Région de Tillabéri, rapport mensuel du 1er-31 mai 2020),” OCHA, June 2020, p. 1. “Niger: Factsheet - Tillabéri Region, April-June 2020 (Niger: Factsheet - Région de Tillabéri, avril-juin 2020),” OCHA, August 25, 2020, p. 1.
- ¹¹⁸⁴ Central Sahel/Tillabéri and Tahoua Protection monitoring report June 2020 (Situation Sahel Central / Tillabéri & Tahoua Rapport de monitoring de protection Juin 2020), UNHCR, July 20, 2020, p. 3.
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- ¹¹⁹³ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020*, pp. 181-184.
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