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 Tounour 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; 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

In 2021, GCPEA identified at least 11 reported incidents of attacks on schools in Niger. 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. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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. In 2018, GCPEA identified four incidents of attacks on teachers in Diffa region, and one in Tillabéri. 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. 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.
The UN and ACLED reported that members of an armed group shot and injured two teachers in Dessa, Famaale 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

1179 Information received from an NGO correspondent on July 22, 2021.


1181 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf


1184 Central Sahel/Tillabéri and Tahoua Protection monitoring report June 2020 (Situation Sahel Central / Tillabéry & Tahoua Rapport de monitoring de protection Juin 2020), UNHCR, July 20, 2020, p. 3.


1186 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf


1191 Information from a UN respondent received via email on November 27, 2021.


1194 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf


1197 “Quarterly report on the protection of populations affected by conflicts in Tillabéri region “(Rapport trimestriel d’analyse de la situation de protection des populations Affectées par les conflits dans la région de Tillabéri),” Danish Refugee Council, July 2020, p. 3.

1198 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf

1199 Information from an NGO respondent on July 22, 2021.


1204 Information from a UN respondent received via email on November 27, 2021.