NIGER

Instability in the Sahel pushes conflict to record levels

⚑ KEY FACTS

Population: **24.2 million**

3.8 million people in need of humanitarian aid

1.5 million facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+)

266,500 people internally displaced

230,000 refugees hosted, mostly from Nigeria (168,000) and Mali (60,000)

132nd (of 195 countries) for capability to prevent and mitigate epidemics

76% of women and girls are married before age of 18

155th (of 167 countries) for women's equality

173rd (of 181 countries) for resilience to climate change

3/5 score for severity of access constraints

58% of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan

Above: Malian children attend an IRC-supported school in Tabareybarey camp, Niger near the border with Mali.

PROBABILITY

7 HUMAN THREAT

5 NATURAL THREAT

IMPACT

8 CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

9 EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

The main reason that Niger remains on the Watchlist for the third year in a row is the intensifying armed conflict that now affects two distinct parts of the country, disrupting livelihoods, forcing people to leave their homes, and restricting humanitarian access.

Niger is caught in the middle of two distinct conflicts, with the Central Sahel crisis affecting western Niger and the Lake Chad Basin crisis spilling over into the East of the country. Violence is rising rapidly in the country's western Tillaberi and Tahoua regions, which sit in the tri-border area with Burkina Faso and Mali. In 2020, recorded conflict-driven fatalities in these regions surpassed those in the Diffa region of the Lake Chad Basin for the first time. Adding to this situation, conflict in northern Nigeria has driven a rapid influx of refugees into Niger's southern Maradi region, reaching 70,000 by October 2020 - along with 17,000 Nigeriens who are now displaced internally in Maradi due to the instability spreading across the border (UNHCR). Moreover, climate change is increasing the risk of natural shocks like drought and flooding. The COVID-19 pandemic has therefore hit Niger at a particularly vulnerable time for the country.

"Heightened insecurity and COVID-driven economic downturns are limiting the ability of Niger to address the full scale of its humanitarian crisis, which floods caused by heavy rainfall are further worsening. Access remains particularly challenging with a concerning rise in attacks on humanitarian assets. Yet, the protection of civilians and humanitarian considerations have come too low on the priorities of the international community. The international community should promote the neutrality and independence of humanitarians, the safety of aid workers and their unfettered access to vulnerable populations."

- Adam Lewa
Emergency Response Manager, IRC Niger

HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

▶ **Violence is escalating rapidly and is set to reach record levels in 2020, principally due to growing instability in the tri-border area with Burkina Faso and Mali.** According to ACLED, the previous bloodiest year in Niger was 2015, when the Diffa region was heavily affected by conflict spilling over from northeast Nigeria. Conflict activity then dropped rapidly in 2016 and 2017, but has been rising steadily ever since – now driven by rapidly growing conflict in the tri-border area with Burkina Faso and Mali on top of the ongoing violence in Diffa. Moreover, there is also regular violence along communal lines, particularly between farming and herding communities, which militant groups have sought to exacerbate. Principally due to conflict, almost 257,000 Nigeriens had been displaced internally as of October 2020 (UNHCR).

▶ **The number of people in need of assistance more than doubled between 2019 and 2020 (OCHA) as COVID-19 has compounded the impact of rising conflict**. Even before the pandemic and the record conflict seen so far in 2020, Niger was already ranked lowest in the world by UNDP for Human Development and 40% of the population was impoverished (World Bank). Market closures and other measures to control COVID-19 have destroyed livelihoods for many people. The population has long suffered from chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. 2.7 million people face food insecurity, nearly 10% of the total population (OCHA). The number of people facing Crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity has increased by 77% in just two years (OCHA) and is likely to grow in 2021.

▶ **Restrictions on humanitarian access complicate the response**. However, ongoing conflict activity as well as measures enforced by the Nigerien authorities, particularly requirements for humanitarians to use military escorts, at times limit the ability of the IRC and other NGOs to help meet these growing needs. For instance, OCHA reports at least six assessment missions in Tillaberi and Tahoua were canceled due to requirements for escorts in the first seven months of 2020, affecting aid for thousands of people at a time when needs were rising due to the pandemic (OCHA). Conflict and states of emergency also limit the population's access to humanitarian services as well as livelihoods and markets.

▶ **Climate change is increasing the frequency of natural shocks, particularly droughts and flooding**. Niger ranks in the bottom ten countries globally for high vulnerability to the impacts of climate change (ND-GAIN). In 2020, Niger experienced the worst floods in its history, which affected over half a million people, damaged large swathes of farmland, and disrupted other livelihoods such as fishing (FAO).

◤ THE IRC IN NIGER

The IRC supports displaced populations and local communities in the Diffa, Tillaberi and Agadez regions and plays a leading role in the rapid response mechanism in Niger. We provide vulnerable populations with cash transfers, food vouchers, agricultural support and protection programs for women and children. The IRC's health response includes screening and treating severely malnourished children and providing healthcare centers with essential equipment and medicine. Learn more about the IRC's Niger response.

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