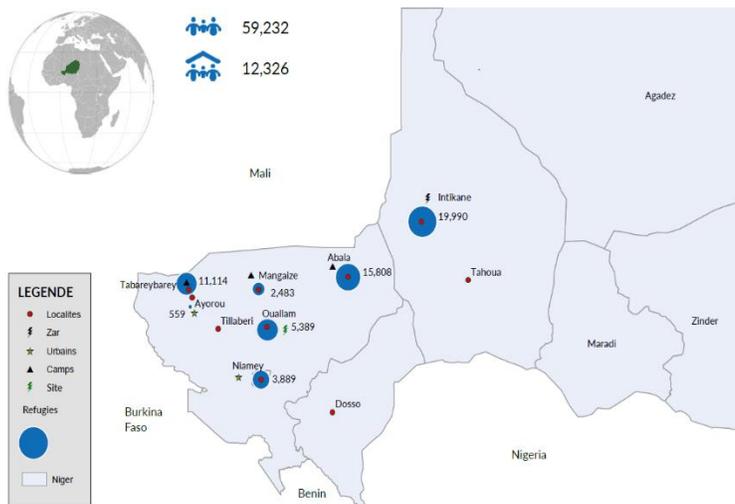


Malian refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Update August 2020

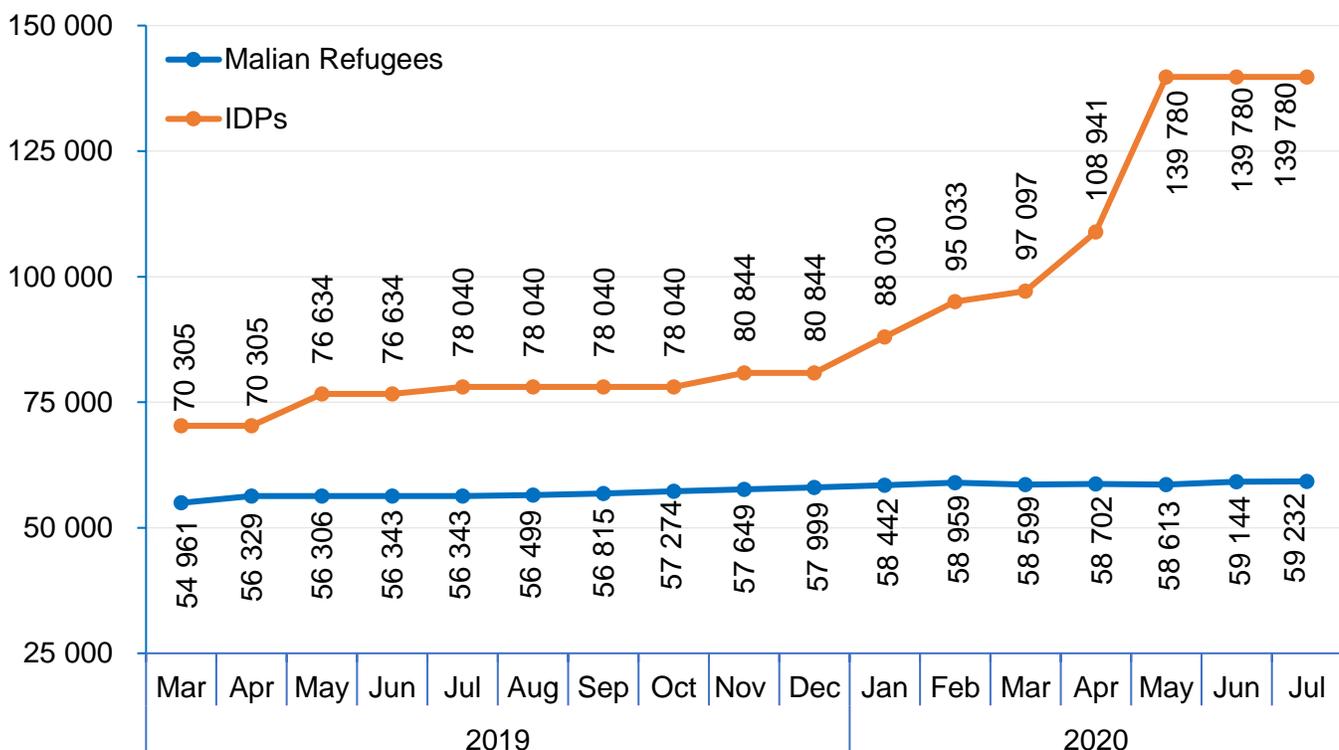
Map of Malian Refugees as of 31 July 2020



Niger has been hosting Malian refugees since the outbreak of the conflict in northern Mali in 2012. As of July 31, 2020, UNHCR Niger has registered **59,232 Malian refugees** in its biometric database. They are living in 3 areas in the Tillabery region (Ayorou, Ouallam, Abala), in a refugee hosting area for nomadic refugees in the Tahoua region, and in the capital Niamey.

The gradual deterioration of the security situation has caused the **internal displacement 139,780 persons** in the same regions with rising numbers every day.

In addition, the presence of armed groups in Burkina Faso has triggered the cross-border displacement of at least **3,803 Burkinabe in the Tillabery region** further adding to rising numbers of internal displacement.



Operational Strategy

- The interventions in the Tillabery and Tahoua regions are aligned to **UNHCR's Sahel strategy**, a scaled-up response to the unprecedented violence and displacement crisis in the Sahel. Activities planned pre-COVID 19 will be implemented in line with public health measures imposed as a result of the pandemic. Key priorities include addressing shelter needs in overcrowded settlements, supporting distance education, providing effective response to SGBV incidents aggravated by confinement measures, and continuing other protection activities such as registration, documentation and facilitating access to asylum
- **With the support of CERF and ECHO**, the crisis is monitored by a broad community-based network and analysis is shared with the humanitarian community. Capacity building and coordinated efforts with humanitarian actors are ongoing to ensure an adequate response to the situation. UNHCR has the lead over the national protection cluster.
- After almost 8 years of presence in Niger, UNHCR and the Government of Niger give priority to **medium- and long-term solutions for Malian refugees** with a view to promote social cohesion, self-reliance and a durable integration into national services and systems. All Malian refugee camps have been closed towards the end of 2019 in line with the joint vision of the Government and UNHCR and given the deterioration of the protection and security context. UNHCR is **relocating Malian refugees** from the camps of Tabareybarey, Mangaize and Abala to the villages of Ayerou, Ouallam and Abala with the support of the CERF.
- Thanks to the **EU Trust Fund**, UNHCR has set up a collaboration with the Regional Directorates of Health, Education and Hydraulics to ensure the **inclusion of refugees into national systems**. With the support of GIZ, UNHCR and the Government, UNHCR is providing access to land in urbanized sites where Nigerien families will be settled as well. 4000 houses will be delivered to most vulnerable households across refugees and host population in line with true socio-economic inclusion .
- Moreover, a strong **tripartite collaboration** has been developed amongst the **World Bank, the Government of Niger, and UNHCR** to improve access to basic public services and further support for economic opportunities. With the support of **ILO**, Malian refugees will be included in a market-based livelihood intervention in the area of fish production and waste management.
- A Tripartite Agreement between the Governments of Niger, Mali and UNHCR provides a legal framework for **voluntary returns**. UNHCR assists those who wish to return with a cash grant.
- Legislation for assistance and protection to IDPs based on the **Kampala Convention** is in place.



Main developments

Operational context

Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso are all struggling to cope with numerous militant groups moving between the three countries. The security situation in the tri-border region of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali and hence the situation in the Nigerien regions of Tillabery and Tahoua has sharply deteriorated in recent years. This threat is forcing people to flee their homes, and further deprives vulnerable communities of critical basic services as armed groups directly target schools, health centers and other infrastructure. The civilian population is victim of extortion, targeted killings, cattle theft and shop looting and threatened to leave their villages. The national government of Niger has recently extended a state of emergency in the Tillabery region which was first introduced in 2017.

Since the beginning of the year, the security situation has been extremely volatile and worrisome with successive lethal attacks against military positions in Inates, Sine Godar and Agando. Several military positions have been abandoned by the defense and security forces and a resurgence of massive attacks targeting the civilian population has been noted. These attacks have triggered several waves of forced displacement of populations to more secure areas.

The armed groups have increasingly contaminated all the villages, killing mayors and local leaders, looting shops, stealing cattle, recruiting combatants, collecting forcibly the Islamic tax and threatening villagers to leave their homes. They have also systematically destroyed the education facilities with teachers being forced to flee. Thousands of children have been unable to attend school for a year. A constant pressure is exercised on the population that is submitted to severe reprisals in case of cooperation with the military and police forces. The fluid occupation (insurrectional tactics of permanent control without permanent presence) has been expanding constantly.

The national government of Niger has recently extended a state of emergency in the Tillabery region which was first introduced in 2017. Mandatory military escorts and other measures render humanitarian access to several IDP hosting sites challenging and have delayed assistance to those in need.

The global sanitary crisis has heavily impacted on the operational context, including due to measures taken by the Government of Niger to limit the propagation of the virus. These measures had important consequences for humanitarian actors in the field.

Population movements

While much focus of the humanitarian and development community is now on COVID-19, conflict dynamics continued to cause forced movements of the population in the Sahel.

- Insecurity in the Tillabery and Tahoua regions is forcing an ever-growing number of Niger citizens to flee their homes. They are searching for safety in the country or even fleeing to Mali as refugees.
- **Internal displacement** in the Tillabery and Tahoua regions has almost doubled in the last 12 months and figures keep climbing with each passing month. More and more, armed groups ordered the population to leave the place. Several villages are already totally empty with populations abandoning the little they have to move to the next city, where access to water and food is already scarce. We find large concentrations of IDPs in the departments of Tillia (41,793), Abala (30,412), Ayerou (21,951), Tassara (13,832), Tillabery (11,781), Banibangou (10,381), Ouallam (6,567), Torodi (2146) and Tera (917). Additional displacement could create severe intercommunity problems in an area where the ethnic fiber is sensitive.
- At the same time, an increasing number of Malian refugees' thinks is safer to **return** to their home country rather than remain in Niger. In Ayerou, 875 households' of 1153 individuals have applied for the facilitation of voluntary return. But given the corona virus situation, voluntary repatriation is temporarily suspended. On the other hand, it should be noted that to this date 69 households of 278 Malian refugees previously having benefitted from a grant for facilitated return, have returned to Ayerou. In Ouallam, 227 households of 1,100 individuals confirmed their intention to return to their area of origin. Counselling is being done at the location of these households because the activity has been postponed due to the border closure.
- Following the attack on the Intikane Refugee Hosting Area, 3,793 refugee households (19,992 individuals) have been registered in the area of which 952 households (5,301 persons corresponding to 26% of the total population) have moved to the site of Telemcess.

Key activities



Fatima, a refugee from Mali, uses a sewing machine to make face masks at a workshop in Niamey
© UNHCR/Marlies Cardoen

- Prevention and response to **the global COVID-19 pandemic** remains paramount. While UNHCR continues to deliver life-saving aid, the organization has set up a strategy focusing on increased coordination with the Government and other stakeholders. Key elements in the Tillabery and Tahoua regions are support to the authorities with prevention and curative equipment and supplies, including isolation centers, the set-up of hand washing basins and sensitizations in all refugee hosting areas and the production of soap, mouth masks and bleach to be distributed freely. The COVID-19 response is carried out thanks to the support of flexible donors such as PRM, France, Monaco and Luxembourg.
- **The situation in Tahoua region** is still feeling the effect of the May attack – a contingency plan is almost finalized. Meetings between UNHCR and its implementing partners on the internal regulations of the refugee hosting area in Intikane take place.
- UNHCR and partners also look into the development of an action plan for maintaining the **civilian and humanitarian character of Intikane** and promote peaceful coexistence. In this regard, trainings of military forces and UNHCR's implementing partners on the importance of maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum are ongoing. Also, during the month of July, protection monitoring missions on the temporary site of Telemcess have taken place, including on resettlement and on livelihood support. Water trucking continues in Telemcess.
- **A first voluntary return operation of displaced persons from Telemcess to Intikane** took place. 7 households of 42 individuals (including 5 refugee households and 2 IDP households) as well as their luggage were transported to Intikane. The operation will continue in August. Other additional trucks are expected to help speed up the operation.
- With the support of the people of Japan, 702 **emergency shelter kits** have been given to refugees and internally displaced persons in the refugee hosting area of Intikane. In total, during the month of July 1702 emergency shelter kits have been donated to refugees and IDPs in the Sahel regions of Tillabery and Tahoua – benefitting almost 12,000 vulnerable persons.



Emergency shelter consists of a shelter kit with tarpaulin, mats, wood, ropes and tools for construction which can be used to provide a simple but sturdy shelter.

- On 7 July 2020, the **one-stop-shop in Ouallam**, constructed thanks to the support of GIZ, has been inaugurated by the Governor of the Tillabery region, in presence of the Director-General of the National Refugee Body (Commission Nationale d'Eligibilité) and the Mayor of Ouallam. The "One Stop Shop" is a single building in Ouallam that serves as a protection and assistance platform for all urban asylum seekers and refugees. Here they are able to access all services, uphold their basic rights and right to protection, and access information as well as any multi-sectoral assistance provided by different actors, including the Government, UNHCR, and any NGOs that are active in Ouallam.



- On 10 July 2020, the Deputy Representative of UNHCR has officially handed over **infrastructure of the former refugee camps of Tabareybarey and Mangaize** to the authorities. The ceremony was attended by the Governor of Tillabery, in presence of the Director-General of the National Refugee Body (Commission Nationale d'Eligibilité), the Prefects of the Departments of Ayerou and Ouallam, the Mayors of Ayerou and Tondikwindi and the implementing partners of UNHCR.
- On the temporary site of Telemcess, 2 **latrine** blocks and shower blocks have been rehabilitated. In Abala, a total number of 80 latrines are being constructed by Mercy Corps while in Ayerou, the Spanish Red Cross is constructing family latrines for the GIZ-financed houses. 540 hygiene kits have also been distributed in Ayerou.
- In Ouallam, the urbanized site will be connected to the **city's water network**. A feasibility study is underway.
- During the month of July, the following **livelihood activities** have taken place:
 - In Tahoua region, the TATITE breeders group (103 individuals) have benefited from 26 heads of small ruminants; the TADIHALTE group (113 individuals) has received kits to do retail; the MANSAY Craftsmen's Group (92 individuals) have received a

- support to produce small items such as pillows, coin purses, swords, key rings, knives, mats.
- In Ayerou, 3 groups have received cash for livestock for a total amount of 19 million. This will allow small businesses to breed and sell ruminants.
- In Abala, training fees have been paid to 60 refugee students and 40 locals. Each student has received a grant of 15,000 FCFA (corresponding to 25 EUR or 30 USD).
- With the support of GIZ, the production of hydraform bricks in the departments of Ayerou, Ouallam and Abala have resumed. In Abala, 2 sample houses have been completed and 22 workers are trained.



Construction of social housing for the most vulnerable refugee and host households is ongoing in the Tillabery region. UNHCR has pledged to construct 4000 social houses in Tillabery © UNHCR / Marlies Cardoen

- In Ouallam, UNHCR has refilled **381 gas bottles** and continues to collect waste with the communities. Rehabilitation of used soils continues in Inazdane.
- In Ouallam, a total number of **37,8 m³ waste** has been collected, in Abala this was 18,66 m³. They were sent to the landfill and waste recovery site.
- In the Tillabery region, UNHCR and partners have organized **6 sanitation sessions** of the neighborhoods of the camps with the environment committees and community relay persons. 147 persons have taken part in these campaigns.

Main challenges

- Further to presence of armed groups, restrictive measures imposed as part of the State of Emergency and ongoing military operations – the COVID-19 crisis also will have important socioeconomic consequences on populations living in the affected areas. Humanitarian access in refugee hosting areas, especially near the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso, is cumbersome. Cross-border and further internal displacement are ongoing.
- UNHCR's country operation funding expectations and needs haven't been properly filled in 2020, due to a global pandemic which impacted donors' ability to fund, and therefore lead to an important reorientation of areas of funding. National capacities are

overwhelmed, and international support has been disproportionately dedicated to security assistance, with limited resources being made available for urgently needed humanitarian and development activities. Furthermore, as many donor countries are hit economically by the COVID-19 infection, financial contributions received do not meet the operational needs.

Coordination and partnerships

- For UNHCR forced displacement requires a **comprehensive approach to development** and should be considered a development, poverty reduction and climate issue. Including forcibly displaced and their hosts in development interventions is key for the transition out of poverty of the country and to boosting resilience. UNHCR interventions target not only refugees and IDPs, but also host communities who live in same conditions of high vulnerability -- with a view to move towards economic integration and social inclusion. This approach of inclusion and development is fully endorsed by the Government of Niger and aligned with the Global Compact for Refugee and the Humanitarian-Development Nexus. This approach is at the core of UNHCR's OUT OF CAMP strategy and is operationalized through ongoing collaborations with the World Bank Group, the German development agency (GIZ) and the European Union (EUTF) and the ILO. With the idea of deepening its role of convener, UNHCR is also looking into strengthening relationship with private sector actors as they are a crucial partner for boosting economic growth and job creation.
- In order to lend support to **protection clusters** at national level in terms of advocacy, facilitate coordination between countries and regional IASC, providing visibility through data driven analysis, and serving as a platform for information sharing and best practices, the Regional Bureau in Dakar has initiated bilateral and multilateral consultations with key stakeholders including donors to revitalize the Regional Protection Working Group (RPWG). A task force composed of UNICEF, UNFPA, OCHA, UNWOMEN, IOM, OHCHR, UNHCR and SOS has been established to draft the strategy as well as the TORs which are being commented on and will be further adopted. Through the Regional Protection Working Group, appropriate support will be provided to the protection crisis in the Sahel.

Donors

Special thanks to:

DONORS WHO HAVE PROVIDED CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNHCR OPERATIONS IN THE TILLABERY AND TAHOUA REGIONS IN NIGER (2020)

CERF | European Union | ECHO | France | Japan | Luxembourg | United States of America | Spain | Private donors | Peacebuilding Fund

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