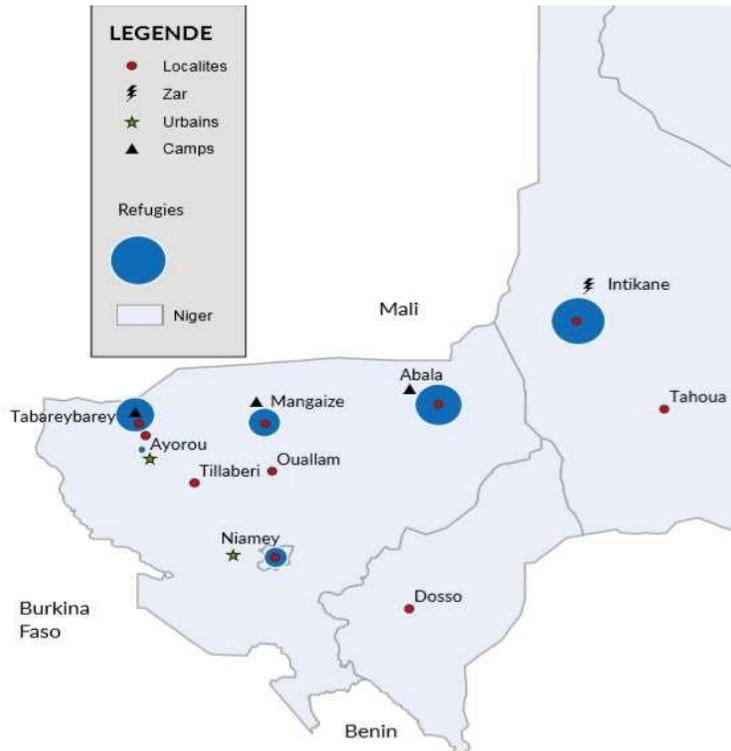


## Malian refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

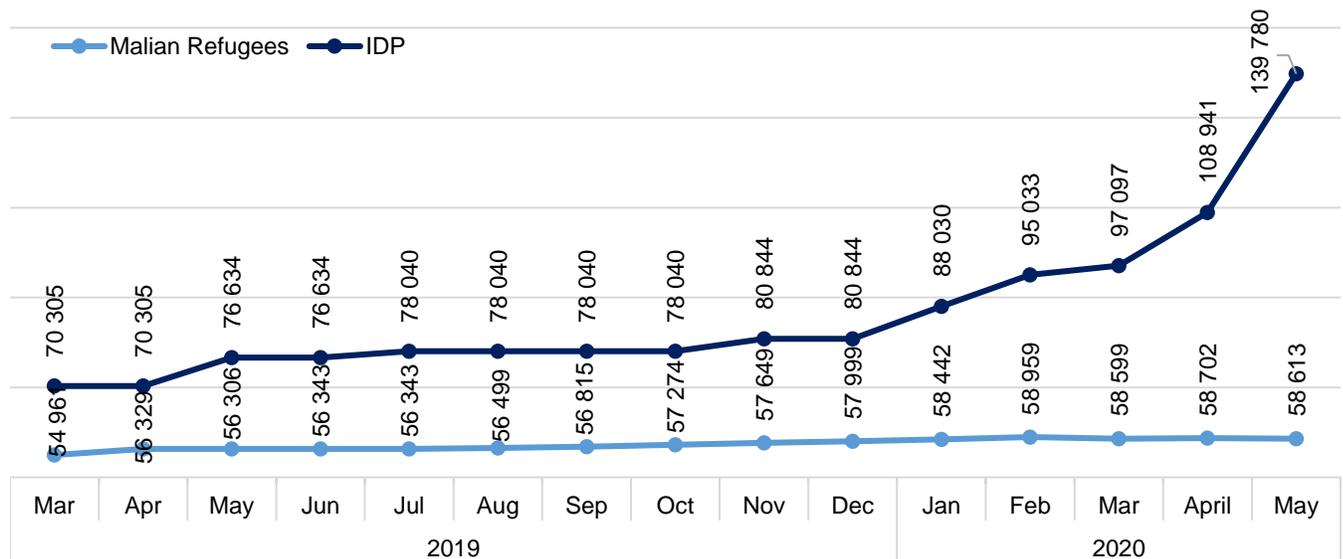
Update June 2020



Niger has been hosting Malian refugees since the outbreak of the conflict in northern Mali in 2012. As of February 29 2020, UNHCR Niger has registered **58,613 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 of 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 **3,514 Burkinabe in the Tillabery region** further adding to rising numbers of internal displacement.



## Operational strategy

- 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 Ayorou, 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.
- The IDP crisis is monitored by a broad community-based network and analysis is carried out on a regular basis. 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. Legislation for assistance and protection to IDPs based on the Kampala Convention is in place.



*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*

## Main developments

### Security situation

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.

During the month of May, the security context has been marked by a continuation of harassment activities against the population and their leaders after significant setbacks during the previous months caused by coalition operations. 15 attacks causing 92 victims have taken place. **A series of attacks in different villages in the Tillabery region**, located a 100 kilometers away from the Malian border, killed at least 20 civilians. Moreover, on 30 May 2020, over **50 armed men on motorbikes swarmed into the refugee hosting area of Intikane**, which is located 72 kilometers from the Malian border and hosts some 20,000 refugees and an additional 15,000 displaced Niger nationals. In addition to killing 3 leaders, the assailants torched stocks of relief items, destroyed mobile phone towers and the main water station and pipes, thus cutting communication and the water supply to the displaced population and their host communities.

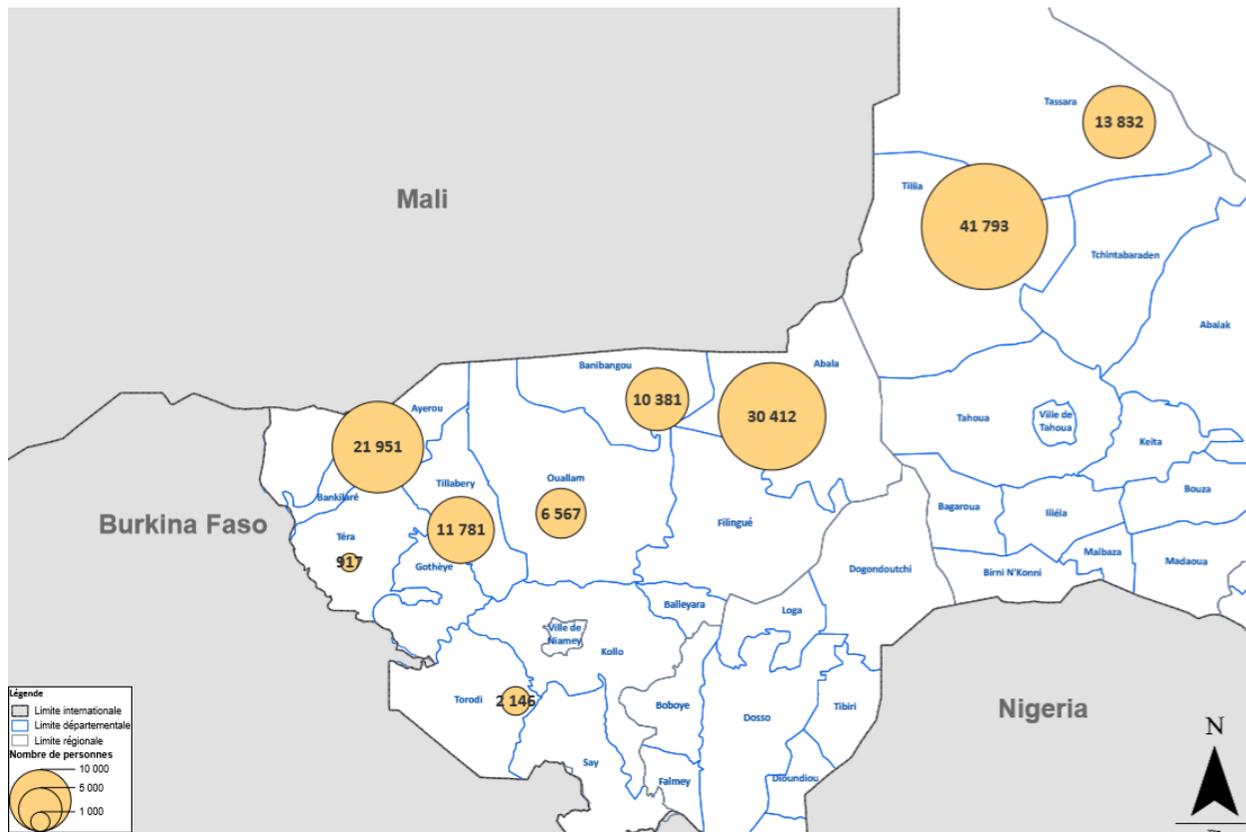
The national government of Niger has recently extended a state of emergency in the Tillabery region which was first introduced in 2017. Mandatory military escorts and other measures render humanitarian access to several IDP hosting sites challenging and have delayed assistance to those in need.

### 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, the lack of livelihood activities and difficulties to access humanitarian aid 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.



- In Mali, UNHCR and partners have started **registering** Niger citizens as of 23 April 2020. To date, **13 712 Niger refugees** have been registered in the Menaka area. Main drivers are insecurity, insufficient access to humanitarian aid and the presence of livelihood opportunities in Northern Mali (functioning markets, discovery of gold mines in Gao and Menaka, ...).
- At the same time, an increasing number of Malian refugees thinks is safer to **return** to their home country rather than remain in Niger. During the month of March only, 2253 Malian have requested to be assisted through a voluntary repatriation programme but coronavirus-related border closures mean the programme has been temporarily suspended; The EU-funded voluntary return scheme offers approximately \$60 for transport per refugee, as well as information about the situation in the area they'll be returning to;
- In **Ayerou** (Tillabery region), over 6000 Malian refugees settled on the urbanized site had left in February 2020 following threats by armed groups. Today, awareness campaigns are ongoing to request refugees to return to the urbanized site. They are conducted

similarly with religious leaders, municipal officials, the Ministry of Interior, technical services, security forces and partner organizations. Since the end of the Ramadan period, populations are slowly returning to the site;

- Following the security incident in **Intikane**, over 9200 individuals have left the refugee hosting area of which some 400 have returned to Mali (Tamalet, Inchinanane, Aghazzarakane). A verification is ongoing. Over 8000 persons (most of them Malian refugees) have arrived in the village of Telemces a village located some 25 km from the refugee hosting area of Intikane while the remaining persons are scattered in different villages in Tillia Department.



In Temelces, the large influx exacerbates pressure on access to natural resources such as water. Since the beginning of the year, 4323 persons have arrived in the refugee hosting area of Intikane, of which 2633 IDPs and 1690 Malian refugees. The latter are originally from Tamalet, Anderramboukane, Menaka, Gao, Inchinanane and Tankadami.

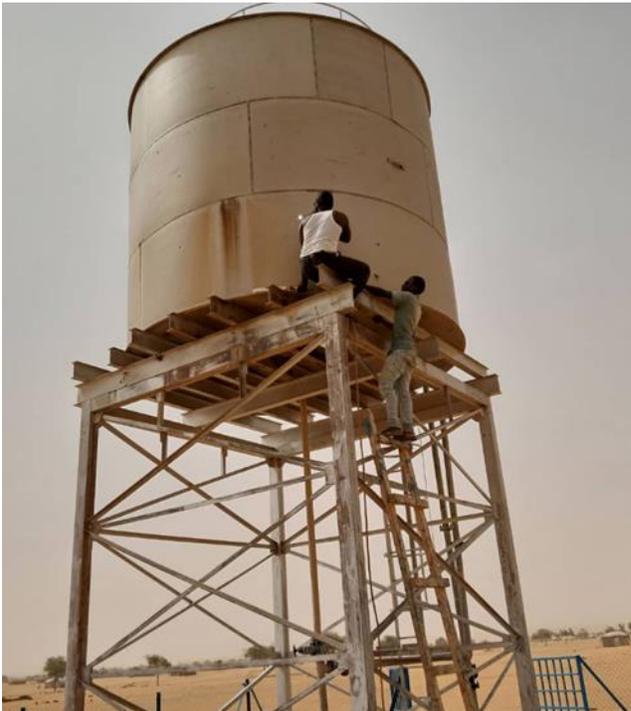
## Key activities

### COVID-19

- Prevention and response to the global COVID-19 pandemic is key today. 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. All UNHCR field representations are actively taking place in regional and sub-regional committees set up by the Government. They coordinate with other regional stakeholders, divide intervention areas and share information on capacities.
- In Ayorou, Ouallam, Abala and Intikane, UNHCR strengthened washing facilities and has distributed soap. With the support of partner organizations, UNHCR engaged in mass communication campaigns through the use of public criers, theatre, door to door sensibilizations, and messages in languages spoken by refugees on community radios. An important scale up of medical and WASH (Water Hygiene Sanitation) staff is ongoing.
- UNHCR has donated medical supplies to the regional authorities in Tillabery and Tahoua. These are used to reinforce the health centers in the region and to protect members of the administration. In Tahoua, the authorities inaugurated a site where potential COVID-19 cases will be isolated and treated. UNHCR has donated 40 Refugee Housing Units to set up the site. In Tillabery, a health center constructed by UNHCR has been identified as the location for the setup of the isolation and treatment center.

- With the support of the NGOs Forge Art and ADES, UNHCR has continued to train refugees and Niger citizens in **the production of bleach, soap and masks in all refugee hosting areas in both regions**. These activities will continue over the coming months. The production will be soon distributed among PoCs, vulnerable households in the hosting communities and hospitals of the areas affected by COVID-19. The effort of refugees in Niger to be **part of the solution** continues stronger than ever.

### **Refugee Hosting Area Intikane**



In Eknewane, a new generator has arrived and works to repair the **water distribution network** have started. UNHCR and partners distribute potable water in Telemces. In close cooperation with the local authorities and partners, registration of new arrivals is ongoing and people on the Telemces site have access to health, education and other basic services. Most of the populations currently installed in Telemces wish to return to the Refugee Hosting Area in Intikane once the site is secured.

- Following the attack in Intikane, the **Rapid Response Mechanism** has initiated an evaluation mission (4 to 7 Juin) to initiate an adequate response to populations in Intikane and those on the move. A rapid protection evaluation mission as well as a security evaluation mission is ongoing. WFP has distributed food to refugees in Intikane.

### **Protection & Assistance**

- Rampant insecurity and the COVID-19 preventive measures have had an important impact on **registration and enrolment activities** as they were temporarily suspended. During the month of May, registration of Malian refugees has resumed in the city of Ouallam taking into account preventive measures such as the wear of masks, social distancing and adaptation measures regarding the use of registration tools. Although new Malian refugees have arrived in Intikane, UNHCR and partners have suspended the

activities because insecurity does not allow to carry out activities. As for enrolment activities of IDPs, the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and UNHCR have carried out a large campaign in the Tahoua region during the Month of May, which has allowed to enroll 55,625 persons. The operation continues in the Tillabery region. This campaign allows to have confirmed and trustworthy statistics as well as disaggregated data to make informed decisions on humanitarian interventions.

- To date, **3514 citizens from Burkina Faso's** Yaga and Tapoa Provinces are settled in 17 different villages nearby the Burkina Faso - Niger border, most of them in areas where humanitarian access is complex. Multi-sector evaluations have been carried out and brought to light that these persons need protection, shelter, basic relief items, healthcare, education, ... UNHCR and partners are working on a strategy to scale up assistance to persons fleeing Burkina Faso. The out of camp approach is the preferred option of UNHCR and the Government. As violence is ongoing on both sides of the borders, more displacement may take place in the coming months.



Beyond COVID-19, UNHCR is looking at interventions to mitigate the socio-economic impact on populations. With the support of CERF and the European Union's Trust Fund, UNHCR and partners have **distributed cash grants to Malian refugees in Ayerou, Ouallam, Tillabery and Intikane** during the month of May. In total, 2089 Malian refugee households (corresponding to 11,728 individuals) have been supported with a cash grant of 15,000 XOF (25 EUR).

- In cooperation with the NGO ADKOUL, UNHCR has refueled 195 bottles of gas for refugee households. Gas cookers are privileged because they diminish the pressure on the scarce wood in refugee hosting areas. Activities to identify land reclamation sites and solid waste collection sessions are carried out by the NGO ADKOUL in Ayerou, Abala and Ouallam. In Ouallam, 960 households have received recharged kits to cook on gas so to save trees.
- **Land allotment** activities are delayed due to COVID-19 preventive measures. In Abala, 80 ha have been subdivided in the framework of a humanitarian land allotment carried out by UNHCR.
- UNHCR has pledged to build 4000 social houses in the region of Tillabery for the most vulnerable refugee and host population households, using the hydraform technique. **The**

**brick factory** of Abala is working on full speed with a total number of 343,370 bricks produced to date and 72 persons hired. In Ayerou, due to insecurity, the brick production is suspended since mid-February. The brick factory hired 68 persons. Finally, in Ouallam, 45 people are hired since the start of the production.

- In Niger's Tillabery and Tahoua regions, UNHCR and partners have **rehabilitated degraded land** through the technique of the half moon and assisted forest regeneration. In Ayerou and Intikane, refugees and host communities have received training on how to improve their shelter built in local clay.

## 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 is ongoing.
- Additional support from development partners is needed to complete the urbanization program and to reinforce infrastructure in urbanized areas.



*After the Intikane attack, UNHCR and humanitarian actors stay and deliver aid to Malian refugees, IDPs and their host communities. All persons of concern have access to water © UNHCR*

## Coordination and partnerships

- 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.
- In April, the World Bank has approved the Learning Improvement for Results in Education (LIRE) project. In Niger, more than a half of children between the age of 7 and 12 do not have **access to education**. The project aims to: 1) improve the quality of teaching and learning conditions nationwide, including in select refugee hosting communities; and 2) is focused on strengthen the Government's education policies, including for persons under UNHCR's mandate. Under the current situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project will also focus on developing and strengthening the capacity to provide distant-learning programs. In line with the response to COVID-19, WB and UNCHR have also exchanged on the WB emergency HEALTH project and UNCHR has provided some valuable guidance and shared its experience in supporting the Government in their response plan.

## Donors

### Special thanks to:

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

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