NIGER

Attacks on education in Niger increased between 2017 and 2019 as fighting in Diffa, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions escalated. Armed groups threatened and attempted to abduct teachers in the Diffa region. In Tillabéri and Diffa regions, various non-state armed groups reportedly burned and looted schools and school canteens. Nigerien defense forces also reportedly used schools as temporary bases and used excessive force against school and university student protesters, arresting dozens.

Context

Between 2017 and 2019, insecurity increased in Niger in both the southeastern Diffa region and in Tillabéri and Tahoua regions at the western borders with Mali and Burkina Faso. ACLED found that reported casualties from direct attacks targeting civilians increased by 500 percent in a five-month period from November 2018 to March 2019 as compared to the same period one year earlier.[1339]

Active in Niger since 2014,[1340] Nigeria-based armed group Boko Haram increasingly carried out attacks in Diffa region at the end of 2018 and into 2019.[1341] For example, while 12 violent events linked to Boko Haram were recorded in Diffa in 2017, 36 were documented in 2018, and 32 in the first three months of 2019.[1342] The group reportedly abducted girls in Diffa on multiple occasions, such as an incident on November 24, 2018, when Boko Haram armed elements reportedly abducted 18 girls from two villages.[1343]

The Islamic State of the Greater Sahara ("ISGS"), and affiliates, carried out violent attacks on civilians and military out-posts and convoys in Tillabéri during the reporting period.[1344] In addition, pro-government armed groups, including the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) and the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA) also reportedly committed deadly attacks during the 2017-2019 reporting period.[1345] Military operations by Nigerien armed forces in the western regions also led to counter-attacks by armed groups in 2019, according to UNHCR and ICG.[1346]

The hostilities adversely affected Niger and exacerbated existing fragility caused by food insecurity, drought, and flooding. The Human Development Index categorized Niger as the world's least developed country in 2018 and 2019.[1347] At the end of 2019, OCHA estimated that 2.9 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, at least 500,000 more than the previous year.[1348] At the end of October 2019, UNHCR and the Nigerien government reported over 188,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 218,000 refugees, most of whom were fleeing violence in neighboring Mali and Nigeria.[1349]

Conflict also weakened Niger's education system during this reporting period. In 2018, UNHCR reported that insecurity constrained the right to education in Tillabéri region for various reasons, including: armed groups preaching against alleged "Western education", teacher shortages in conflict-affected areas, internal displacement, and threats made to education staff.[1350] OCHA reported that over 110 schools were closed in Tillabéri at the end of 2019 due to insecurity and targeted attacks.[1351] In 2019, Nigerien security forces underwent a training in child protection that included the identification and prevention of risks, such as attacks on and military use of educational facilities.[1352]

GCPEA did not profile Niger in previous *Education under Attack* reports so no comparisons were made to earlier reporting periods.

Attacks on schools

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA identified at least 50 reported incidents of attacks on schools in Niger. Attacks on schools increased over the reporting period, consistent with the spread of fighting and attacks by armed groups into western Niger and increased Boko Haram activity in 2018 and 2019. Armed groups most frequently looted or burned schools, though GCPEA also identified the use of explosives to conduct attacks. While not profiled in the *Education under Attack 2018*, GCPEA identified more than five reported attacks on education in Niger between 2013 and 2017.[1353]

In 2017, GCPEA received two reports of attacks on schools in Diffa region, where fighting between Boko Haram and national and regional security forces continued. The Regional Directorate for Primary Education reported the following:

- On the evening of May 2, 2017, unidentified armed assailants attacked Boudoum School, in Maine Soroa de-

partment, Diffa region, damaging or destroying school supplies, teaching aids and preschool toys.[1354]

– On May 22, 2017, armed assailants looted Garin Dogo school in Gueskerou department, Diffa region.[1355] The attackers stole six tarpaulins for Temporary Learning Spaces and food from the school canteen, amongst other items. Attackers had allegedly attempted to loot the school on previous occasions.[1356]

GCPEA received nine reports of attacks on schools in 2018 in Diffa region, from the UN, media sources, and international organizations.[1357] In May 2018, the UN reported that 30 schools were either closed or non-operational in Diffa due to insecurity.[1358] In some cases, attacks near schools caused schools to close, such as when an armed group reportedly attacked a military base in the town of Chétimari on January 29, 2018, after which the school temporarily closed.[1359] Examples of attacks in Diffa included:

– On the night of January 4, 2018, an armed group reportedly pillaged the school canteen of the primary school in Garin Dogo, Diffa region.[1360]

– On August 15, 2018, unknown armed assailants reportedly looted a vocational training school in Gueskerou, Diffa region.[1361]

– On December 5, 2018, unknown armed attackers attempted to remove supplies from the Djalori Primary School in Gueskerou, Diffa region.[1362]

– *Reuters* and local media reported that on June 4, 2018, three suicide bombers allegedly detonated explosive belts at three locations in Diffa region, including at a Quranic school. Ten people were reported as killed and 38 were wounded in the three explosions.[1363]

In 2018, GCPEA received increasing reports of attacks on schools in Tillabéri region, located at the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso. According to the Education Cluster, between October 2018 and February 2019, a total of 89 primary schools closed in Tillabéri for security reasons. The Education Cluster also reported that during the same period, over 30,000 students faced barriers to accessing 265 primary schools in Tillabéri due to security reasons.[1364] During the 2018-2019 school year, the Education Cluster reported that armed groups reportedly attacked ten schools in Tillabéri region.[1365] Examples of these included the following events in 2018:

– On an unspecified date in 2018, unknown assailants reportedly damaged two classrooms in Kokoloko village, in Torodi district, Tillabéri. The school subsequently closed, interrupting the education of 131 students, including 74 girls.[1366]

– On October 10, 2018, in Torodi district, Tillabéri region, unknown armed assailants on motorcycles attacked Tangounga primary school. No students or teachers were harmed. According to a local education authority, the school was targeted due to the presence of state military who had camped there. The school closed for at least a month, in part because parents were reportedly fearful, and 166 students, including 85 girls, had no access to education. The incident reportedly created fear amongst the teaching staff. [1367]

– October 27, 2018, an armed group reportedly attacked the primary and secondary schools in Bossey Bangou village, Tillabéri region, located near the border with Burkina Faso.[1368] A total of three classrooms were reportedly burned, as well as the furniture and supplies inside them. The school remained closed for at least three weeks and an estimated 191 girls and 199 boys were affected.[1369]

– According to the Niger Primary Education Inspectorate, five schools were attacked on unspecified dates in 2018 in Gotheye district, Tillabéri region: Mandaw Traditional, Mandaw Sefa, Chawa, Nabambori, and Libiri. At the Mandaw Sefa school, three classrooms operating in huts were subject to arson. At the end of the 2018-2019 school year, only the Libiri school reopened, with 382 students (178 boys and 204 girls) affected at the remaining four schools.[1370]

In 2019, GCPEA collected reports of eight attacks on schools in Tillabéri region[1371] and two in Diffa region,[1372] according to local media, UN agencies, and international organizations. In Tillabéri, armed groups allegedly conducted arson attacks on schools, whereas in Diffa reporting described incidents of attacks using explosive devices and looting. Examples included:

- On January 25, 2019, the Education Cluster reported that a mortar shell was found next to Marie Louise Nursery School in Diffa city. State security forces later destroyed the mortar shell.[1373]

- Between October 1 and 2, 2019, at the scheduled start of the academic year, UNHCR Niger reported four reported arson attacks on schools in Godel, Tcherotatori, Warraou, and Taka villages, in Tillabéri region.[1374]

- According to local media source *ActuNiger*, on October 19, 2019, unidentified armed assailants set fire to two schools located in Kiki and Bomoanga, in Torodi district, Tillabéri region.[1375]

- On November 18, 2019, UNHCR and local media reported that unidentified armed actors conducted an arson attack on a school in Taka Lafia (also spelled Takalayiya), Abala department, Tillabéri region. The attackers also allegedly threatened teachers.[1376]

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA collected at least 13 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel.

In 2017, GCPEA received three reports of incidents of attacks on school teachers in Diffa region. In June 2017, the UN reported that Boko Haram targeted teachers in N'gourtoua and Abounga villages, injuring the school director in N'gourtoua. Following the attack, 27 schools closed due to risk of attacks on teachers.[1377] On October 28, 2017, the Directorate of Primary Education also reported that a member of an armed group allegedly killed a teacher in an unspecified location in Diffa region.[1378]

In 2018, reports collected by GCPEA alleged that members of armed groups made threats to or attempted to abduct teachers or other school personnel in the Diffa region on at least five occasions. In 2018, five reported incidents affected teachers, four of them in the Diffa region and one in the Tillabéri region. With regard to students, there are two reported incidents in the Diffa region, which led to the death of one student. These included:

- On the night of November 30, 2018, in Gueskerou, Diffa region, members of an armed group allegedly attempted to abduct a female teacher from her house.[1379]

- The Education Cluster received a report that on December 10, 2018, unknown actors allegedly threatened a Malam Boulori primary school teacher by telephone in an unspecified town in Diffa region.[1380]

- The Education Cluster received a report that on December 11, 2018, unknown actors reportedly threatened a teacher at Toumour primary school in Bosso, Diffa region, inciting fear in local teachers. The school remained opened.[1381]

- On January 17, 2018, the Directorate of Primary Education reported that a stray bullet injured a school student in Toumour school, Bosso district, Diffa region.[1382]

- The Education Cluster reported that on March 22, 2018, in Toumour, Diffa region, a student of the Center of Alternative Education (CEA) was apparently killed by a stray bullet.[1383]

- On December 25, 2018, unknown armed assailants allegedly attempted to abduct the director of Toumour primary school, in Bosso department, Diffa region which, according to the Education Cluster, which led to fear among the teaching staff.[1384]

In 2019, GCPEA collated three reported incidents of attack on school students and personnel. On April 9, 2019, a group of students estimated to be in the thousands assembled in Niamey to lead a protest against a recent strike by the teachers' union. The protesters allegedly blocked traffic with burning tires. Police dispersed the school students with teargas and arrested 97 students, according to media reports. Reports also stated that the clashes led to the injury of 11 police officers.[1385]

In addition, GCPEA identified two incidents in which armed groups threatened or injured teachers in Abala department, Tillabéri region, in November 2019. UNHCR reported that around November 30, armed actors raided Tigzefan village and allegedly whipped four teachers in apparent retribution for teaching the state curriculum and also reportedly stole their personal affects.[1386] The first incident occurred at the same time as an attack on a school and was reported in the previous section, on November 19, 2019, in Taka Lafia.

Military use of schools and universities

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected two reported incidents of military use of schools and universities, as well as anecdotal evidence that suggested the use of schools as campgrounds or temporary bases by state security forces.

In 2017, the Regional Education Directorate reported that on Tuesdays, the local market day, a military vehicle parked in the yard of a school in N'Gagam village, Gueskerou district, Diffa region. Staff of an international humanitarian organization reportedly intervened and explained the tenets of the Safe Schools Declaration to the military personnel and school director.[1387]

According to UNHCR Niger, in 2018, mixed patrols of police, national guard and military used schools when passing through villages in Tillabéri region, making schools vulnerable to attacks by armed groups.[1388] A UN respondent reported that some communities had identified the use of schools as campsites but observed that the forces did not stay multiple nights and left before school commenced in the morning.[1389] In October 2018, regional education authorities in Tillabéri reported one incident to the Education Cluster in which they suspected that an attack on a school occurred because military had frequently camped in the school.[1390]

Attacks on higher education

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA identified three reported incidents of attacks on higher education students and staff. In two incidents, police used excessive force against university students involved in campus protests. A third attack involved an alleged armed group targeting a university research team.

In 2017, GCPEA found one reported instance of an attack on higher education. At the University of Niamey, on April 10, 2017, violent clashes occurred between police and students in the context of a student protest for better conditions and bursaries; one student died and 88 were injured.[1391] Amnesty International reported that a commission of inquiry found the gendarmerie responsible for the killing of the student.[1392]

On April 18, 2018, university students in Niamey protested to demand the reinstatement of five classmates who had been suspended in the previous month. Security forces allegedly fired teargas to disperse the protest and many students were reportedly injured, some severely, according to local media sources.[1393]

On April 7, 2019, local media reported that an armed group attacked a dean, professors, and doctoral students, from the agronomy faculty of Abdou Moumouni University in Niamey, while they were conducting a field mission in Toukounous, Filingue department, Tillabéri region. The unknown armed attackers stole a car belonging to the university, as well as the researcher team's materials and mobile phones.[1394]

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