

Cross-border displacement in Agadez, Maradi, Diffa, and Tillabéri regions

CRISIS OVERVIEW

Niger has become a country of transit and destination for people on the move. Until 3 May, Niger was hosting around 417,000 refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from Nigeria (over 57%) and Mali (over 31%), with the remaining hailing from various other countries, including Burkina Faso, Chad, and Sudan (UNHCR 09/05/2024; UNHCR accessed 15/05/2024). Between 2019–2023, there were over 308,200 migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, arriving, over 1.2 million moving within the country, and over 2.2 million leaving (IOM 14/02/2024; UNHCR 12/04/2024).

Niger links Sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa along its nearly 5,700km border with Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, and Nigeria.

The regions of Niger most affected by frequent displacements are Agadez in the north, which receives refugees and asylum seekers often deported from Algeria; Diffa and Maradi in the southeast, which have seen an influx of individuals from Nigeria and Chad; and Tillabéri in the southwest hosts people from Burkina Faso and Mali.

The needs of the displaced differ between host regions: in Agadez, the priority needs are shelter and protection; in Diffa and Maradi, WASH and health are priorities; and in Tillabéri, food security is the most pressing need.

Regional instability has also increased cross-border displacement. In Mali, there is internal conflict against the Government. In Burkina Faso, the central Government only controls half the territory and the rest is disputed by non-state armed groups (NSAGs). In Nigeria, the presence of NSAGs such as Boko Haram increases insecurity (IRC 14/02/2024; Crisis Group 29/03/2024).

In Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions, there is cross-border crime and an NSAG presence, creating major challenges to response and increasing displacement within Niger (IOM 14/02/2024; UNHCR 12/04/2024).

Food security projections for April and May 2024, indicated that most of Niger would experience Stressed (IPC Phase 2) levels of acute food insecurity, with some parts of western Niger, including Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, experiencing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels (FEWS NET 06/04/2024).

Access to drinking water is limited in Niger, with only 56% of the population (14.5 million people) having access. Only 13% of the population (3.3 million people) have access to basic sanitation services (UNICEF accessed 29/04/2024).

Niger is experiencing outbreaks of disease, including of measles, meningitis, and diphtheria, increasing the risk of spread in crowded shelters occupied by people on the move (UNICEF 13/04/2024; IRC 17/06/2017).

Between January–October 2023, over 3,000 protection incidents were reported in Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions. These incidents included theft and extortion from the civilian population, abduction and recruitment, murder and assassination, sexual violence and early marriage, physical assault and attacks on civilians, incidents linked to explosive devices, and intercommunal conflicts (OCHA 01/03/2024).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

Niger experienced drought at the end of 2023, and over 40% of villages across the country could not produce enough food to survive to the next harvest. It is likely that food insecurity will increase as a result of the lack of food products, economic sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States, and rising food prices, primarily affecting those least food secure, approximately 42% of the total population (around 11 million people) (FEWS NET 23/03/2024; WFP accessed 22/04/2024; Swissaid 29/02/2024; AJ 24/02/2024). The existing and potential worsening food insecurity in the country will also affect displaced people's access to food.

The influx of deportees from Algeria is likely to continue, as the current Algerian Government has strict deportation practices. Elections are scheduled for September 2024, but the opposition candidate is not yet known (RLS 03/2023; Africanews 25/01/2024).

Cross-border displacement from Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria is likely to increase as a result of insecurity stemming from NSAG disputes over territorial control.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Diseases outbreak

Meningitis: Niger is situated predominantly within the African meningitis belt, where there are annual seasonal outbreaks of the disease. Currently, there is an outbreak with a higher incidence of cases and a more rapid rate of growth compared to previous seasons (WHO 08/02/2023). From January–April 2024, there were over 1,000 reported cases of meningitis, resulting in 66 deaths. The case-fatality rate is 6.6% (UNICEF 13/04/2024). Droplets of respiratory or throat secretions from carriers spread meningitis bacteria. Kissing, sneezing, or coughing on someone or living in close quarters with an infected person spreads the disease, especially in overcrowded living conditions, such as temporary shelters housing displaced people (WHO accessed 23/04/2024).

Diphtheria: since July 2023, Niger has also been facing a diphtheria outbreak, with the highest death rate occurring in young children. The outbreak has affected seven of the country's eight regions (WHO 24/11/2023). Since January 2024, Niger has reported 1,063 cases of diphtheria, with 47 deaths. The case-fatality rate is around 4% (UNICEF 13/04/2024).

Measles: there has also been a measles epidemic in the country since 2023 (UNICEF 11/12/2023). Since the beginning of 2024, 1,012 cases of measles have been reported, with one fatality. By April, measles outbreaks were happening in all of Niger's eight regions (UNICEF 13/04/2024). There is high risk that the disease will spread in crowded environments, such as overcrowded shelters.

Economy

The imposition of political and economic sanctions following the July 2023 military coup is leading to a deteriorating economic situation in Niger (UNICEF 13/04/2024). The country has experienced protracted economic difficulties and various forms of instability for several decades (GM 14/08/2023). These economic difficulties have aggravated food insecurity for numerous households throughout the country (USAID 17/11/2023). The main causes of poverty and a weak economy in Niger are a lack of cultivable land, prevalent illiteracy (in 2022, Niger's literacy rate was 38%), and agriculture's vulnerability to climate-related shocks (Borgen Pproject 02/08/2017; WB accessed 10/05/2024). Niger's climate is Sahelian, with high interannual rainfall and multi-year droughts since 1968 (UNDP accessed 29/04/2024). The country experiences a hot climate with consistently high temperatures throughout the year. It has a lengthy and harsh dry season from October–May, followed by a short and erratic rainy season associated with the West African monsoon (WB accessed 29/04/2024). Such climate issues affect agriculture in

particular, the sector employing around 80% of Niger's population (almost 21 million people), making it critical to food security and livelihoods (PIK et al. 2020; WFP accessed 22/04/2024). Market disruptions resulting from weather conditions, insecurity, and sociopolitical factors are also pushing up prices. 42% of the population (around 11 million people) lives below the national poverty line (FEWS NET 29/03/2024; WFP accessed 22/04/2024). Further deterioration in the socioeconomic situation will lead to increasing needs.

FUNDING RESPONSE AND HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

International aid and funding have been drastically reduced since the July 2023 military coup, directly affecting communities dependent on aid. An estimated USD 1.2 billion of external aid has not been disbursed since donors suspended bilateral assistance to Niger following the coup (WFP 02/04/2024; Reuters 29/07/2023). By 31 January 2024, there was a USD 107.8 million funding gap (roughly 79%) for the response to forcibly displaced people (UNHCR 10/04/2024).

The Niger Government has consistently accepted individuals requiring international protection, offering refuge to populations escaping conflict and violence. The Government has also aided underprivileged households across the entire country, including those hosting refugees (UNHCR 10/04/2024).

Assistance plans developed for Tillabéri region only cover a limited proportion of the population in need, as insecurity and the security measures in place restrict the movement of humanitarian organisations (FEWS NET 06/04/2024).

The long distances required to travel to health centres, poor transportation, insecurity, and long procurement lead times are among the factors limiting humanitarian coverage in areas such as Tillabéri (WFP 02/04/2024).

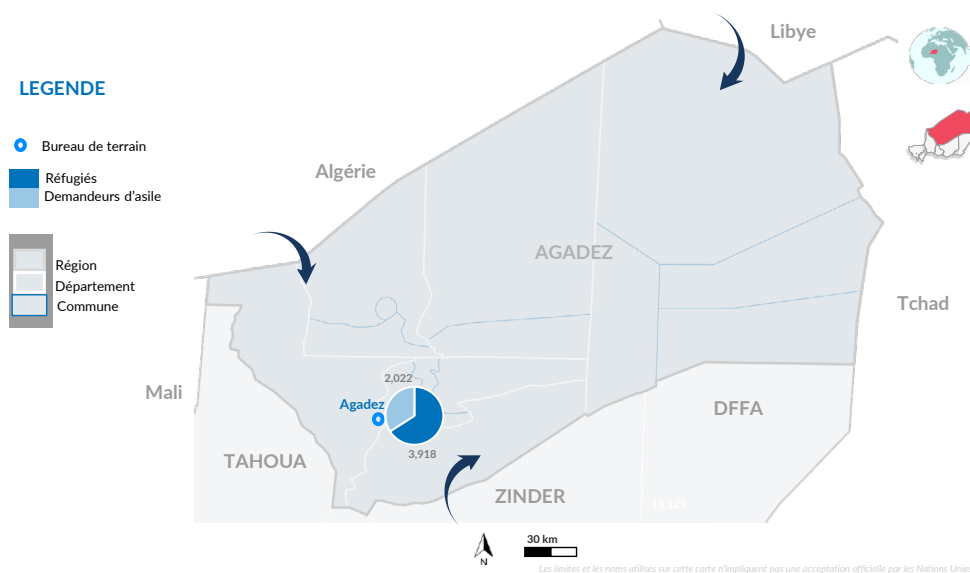
The security situation resulting from the presence of NSAGs and cross-border crime poses significant humanitarian access constraints, particularly in Maradi, Talhoua, and Tillabéri regions. There is a risk of NSAG activities expanding to other regions, further constraining humanitarian response (UNHCR 10/04/2024).

In Maradi region, in December 2023, insecurity made 89 localities in southern states inaccessible to humanitarian response (IOM 05/03/2024). Insecurity near the Nigerian border poses significant access constraints in Maradi's Guidan Roumdji and Madarounfa departments, requiring humanitarian responders to use military escorts (OCHA 27/03/2024).

AGADEZ REGION – DISPLACEMENT FROM ALGERIA

Crisis overview and drivers

Map 1. People affected in Agadez in March 2024



Source: UNHCR (24/04/2024)

In recent decades, Agadez region in northwestern Niger has become a hub for migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to Libya, Algeria, and Europe (AJ 12/04/2024). Algeria regularly deports people to Niger who have migrated irregularly, often leaving them at a place known as Point Zero on the border, in the middle of the Sahara (Le Monde 14/07/2023; Info Migrants 18/11/2022). Between January 2023 and January 2024, more than 32,000 people were officially expelled from Algeria, alongside others who left spontaneously, and arrived in the Niger border town of Assamaka in Agadez region (UNHCR 10/04/2024). Deportees included Nigerians and people from other Sub-Saharan African countries escaping violence, including violence in Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, and Mali linked to the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and other NSAGs (France24 21/06/2023; TV5 Monde 3/05/2023).

In 2023, Algeria deported 26,000 migrants to Point Zero, less than 15% of whom were able to access shelter or protection upon arrival (The New Arab 08/04/2024; RLS 03/2023). Deportations have increased since the beginning of April 2024, as the Algerian Government launched several operations in Tamanrasset town in southern Algeria, where many refugees and asylum seekers live without documentation. In the first three months of 2024, Algeria deported over 17,000 refugees and asylum seekers (The New Arab 08/04/2024). Migrants and refugees reported experiencing violence and theft at the hands of Algerian police during the deportation process (Info Migrant 05/04/2024 and 30/01/2024; Le Monde 05/04/2024). Some have been deported or displaced multiple times from Tunisia, Libya, or Morocco to Algeria and then Niger (Info Migrant 30/01/2024).

Crisis impact

Shelter

The influx of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Adagez has strained host community resources, particularly in Assamaka, which is located in the desert and continues to receive refugees from Algeria, Mali, and other neighbouring countries. Between June–December 2023, Assamaka received 1,818 Malian refugees and more than 32,000 individuals expelled from Algeria via official and unofficial convoys or arriving spontaneously (UNHCR 10/04/2024). The legal status of those expelled is unknown.

In April 2024, the UNHCR was providing assistance to around 2,800 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Agadez region and assisting in the processing of others seeking asylum (UNHCR 10/04/2024). In August 2023, the IOM was accommodating approximately 5,000 migrants in seven transit centres located along migration routes. Four of these centres are in the Agadez region and the remaining three are in Niamey region. In general, these centres have been overwhelmed, unable to handle the large numbers of people, with hundreds of migrants and refugees awaiting assistance outside (IOM 18/08/2023). There have also been reports of Algerian police seizing people's valuables before deporting them, resulting in reduced coping capacity upon arrival in Niger (Info Migrant 05/04/2024; Le Monde 4/04/2024).

Protection

In Agadez, people deported from Algeria to the Sahara are subject to violence from NSAGs (Info Migrant 05/04/2024). The Sahel is a zone disputed by NSAGs seeking to control the area. Agadez is rich in gold and smuggling routes, and is hence strategic for several NSAGs (ACLED 03/08/2023; Le Figaro 06/04/2023).

Some migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have also arrived with bandaged wounds, possibly as a result of violent Algerian police operations (Le Monde 05/04/2024). Among the 2,800 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Agadez in February 2024, 136 were unaccompanied and separated children, and 39 had specific legal and physical protection needs (UNHCR 22/03/2024).

WASH

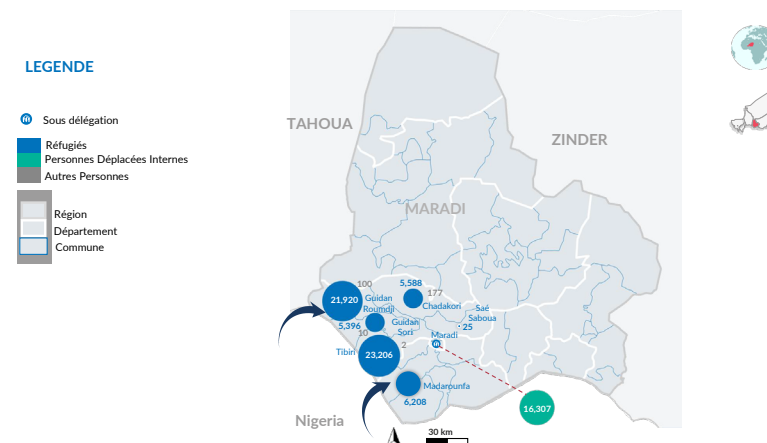
In Agadez, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers reside in rented accommodations shared by individuals of various nationalities, often in overcrowded conditions lacking basic amenities such as running water, electricity, and sufficient food (IFRC 26/02/2018).

In many instances, Algerian authorities leave deportees in the Sahara Desert, in a location 15km from the border town of Assamakkar. Deportees are left without food or water, exposed to hunger, dehydration, fatigue, and other health risks, causing some to go missing or die on the journey. Such cases occur systematically (Info Migrant 05/04/2024; RLS 03/2023; HRW 09/10/2020).

MARADI AND DIFFA REGIONS – DISPLACEMENT FROM NIGERIA AND CHAD

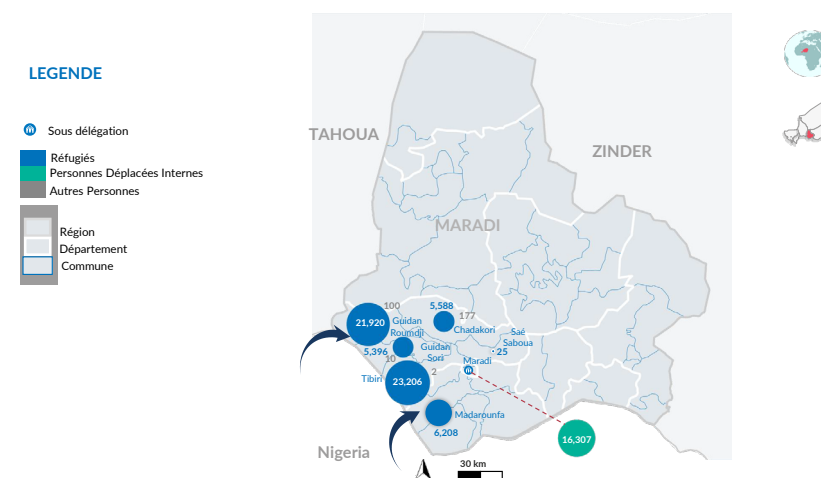
Crisis overview and drivers

Map 2. People affected in Maradi in March 2024



Source: UNHCR (24/03/2024)

Map 3. People affected in Diffa in March 2024



Source: UNHCR (20/05/2024)

Niger's southern regions of Maradi and Diffa are constantly receiving refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from Nigeria and Chad. Since 2013, the Diffa region has been hosting Nigerian refugees fleeing continued violence linked to Boko Haram (MSF 10/05/2017; ACLED 16/04/2024; UNHCR 30/06/2020). Since May 2019, the Maradi region has been facing an influx of refugees from northwestern Nigeria fleeing NSAG lootings, attacks, and kidnappings. By November 2021, approximately 3 million Nigerians had been involuntarily displaced by Boko Haram and other NSAGs. Such displacements have been both internal, within Nigeria itself, and to neighbouring countries such as Niger. Displacement triggered by Boko Haram and other NSAG violence is further aggravated by conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria (UNHCR 06/06/2023; UNHCR accessed 22/04/2024).

In March 2024, there were over 81,700 (62,343 registered) refugees in Maradi region, the vast majority of whom were from Nigeria. Unlike other regions of Niger, Maradi does not have asylum seekers; the region has only two categories of people falling under the UNHCR mandate, refugees and IDPs (UNHCR 24/04/2024). In the Diffa region in March 2024, there were over 127,500 (116,314 registered) refugees, and refugees and asylum seekers accounted for approximately 33% of the region's total population (UNHCR 24/04/2024).

Since the beginning of 2024, armed activity between NSAGs in Nigeria's Sokoto and Zamfara states has caused cross-border displacement to Maradi, particularly to Guidan Roumdji and Madarounfa departments. The largest displacement of the first quarter of 2024 occurred on 24 March, when around 1,420 people (mostly women and children) fled from Nigeria to Tibiri commune, Guidan Roumdji department. Violence between self-defence groups and NSAGs in Nigeria's Zamia village prompted the displacement event (OCHA 27/03/2024). This number is added to the 6,800 reported in February (UNHCR 10/04/2024; OCHA 27/03/2024). Maradi is only 47km from Nigeria, and the Hausa towns and villages on both sides of the border have always engaged in trade, a main reason why refugees from Nigeria pick Maradi as a destination (UNHCR 06/06/2023). Around 20% of the population in the Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions (around 2.8 million people) are experiencing acute food insecurity (FAO 29/02/2024; CP accessed 14/05/2024). The UNHCR is present in both Maradi and Diffa regions, providing transport, food assistance, emergency shelter, and NFIs to displaced people and refugees (OCHA 27/03/2024; UNHCR 10/04/2024). The UNHCR and Ministry of Humanitarian Action are registering and physically verifying over 56,800 displaced people in the Diffa region (UNHCR 10/04/2024).

Crisis impact

Shelter

The waves of displaced people continue seeking shelter in villages close to the Niger-Nigeria border, particularly in the regions of Diffa, Maradi, and Tahoua (IFRC 12/02/2024). Nigerian refugees in Maradi tend to stay with host communities or in emergency shelters built by humanitarian organisations (IOM Niger X 23/02/2024). Most of the Nigerian refugees who came to Niger in March settled in the villages of Tibiri commune (Guidan Roumdji department), including in Chadakori, Dan Godé, Dan Mani, and Intika. By 20 December 2023, however, Chadakori was already home to 3,970 refugees and an additional 5,271 individuals (688 households) (OCHA 27/03/2024). Since 2021, the UNHCR and NRC have been establishing shelters to receive refugees, but there is limited information on the host community's current capacity to host more displaced people (UNHCR 21/06/2021; NRC accessed 29/04/2024). Sayam Forage refugee camp in the Diffa region hosts approximately 32,000 people (UNHCR 10/04/2024).

Health and WASH

In Maradi region, until 27 March, there were only a few health facilities in Intika, Tibiri commune, where over 1,000 of the almost 1,420 Nigerians who fled to Niger were staying. By the end of March, there were no health centres left in Intika, meaning that people faced a 16km journey to the nearest integrated health centre in Bassira village (Tibiri commune) (OCHA 27/03/2024). NSAGs were highly active in the Maradi region in 2023, and are likely to still be there, exposing people to security risks when travelling to the health centre (ACLED 03/08/2023). There is also only one well in Intika, insufficient to accommodating the needs of both the community and displaced people, and a lack of latrines is leading to open air defecation (OCHA 27/03/2024).

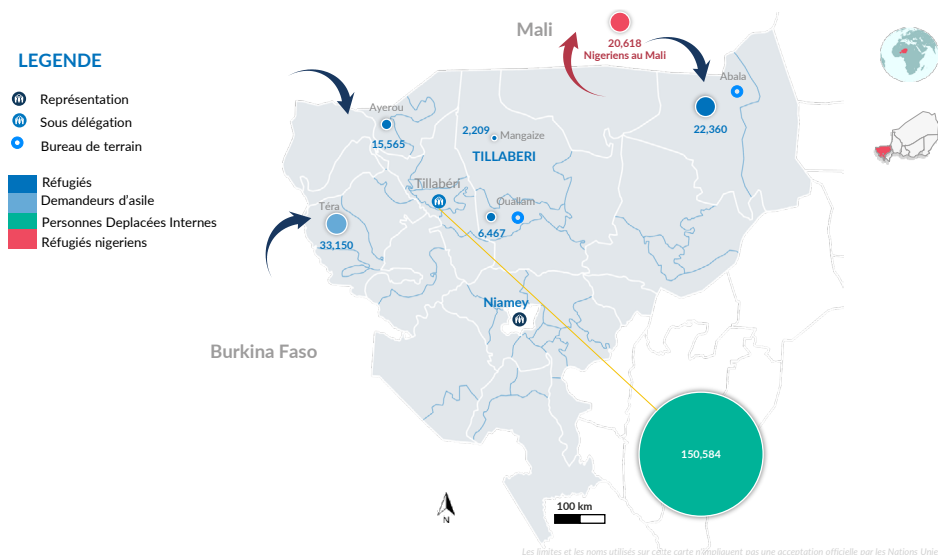
Protection

Most Nigerians displaced to Maradi region do not have identity documents (OCHA 27/03/2024). The unstable security situation along the Niger-Nigeria border exposes displaced people to violence and associated protection risks. Criminal groups operating on both sides of the border target farmers and cattle breeders, often kidnapping them for ransom (UNHCR 10/04/2024). The majority of Nigerians displaced to the Maradi region in March were forcibly displaced by NSAGs with only 72-hours' notice (OCHA 27/03/2024).

TILLABÉRI – DISPLACEMENT FROM BURKINA FASO AND MALI

Crisis overview and drivers

Map 4. People affected in Tillabéri in March 2024



Source: UNHCR (24/04/2024)

Tillabéri is a tri-border region with Burkina Faso and Mali, and political instability and insecurity in those countries have increased cross-border movements into Niger. In March 2024, the population of refugees and asylum seekers in Tillabéri region (formed of the departments of Abala, Ayorou, Balléyara, Banibangou, Bankilaré, Filingue, Gothéye, Kollo, Ouallam, Say, Tera, and Torodi) increased by 12% compared to March 2023, most of whom came from Mali (58%) and Burkina Faso (42%) (UNHCR 24/04/2024). In March, the number of registered IDPs in the region stood at nearly 150,600, of which 81% were women and children, 46,600 were refugees, and over 33,100 were asylum seekers. Compared to March 2023, the number of IDPs the region increased by 3% (UNHCR 24/04/2024).

Between 15–17 April, more than 600 people (90 households), primarily women and children, fled their homes in the village of Dibilo, Tillabéri region, and sought refuge in the town of Tera. These forced displacements followed an attack on 15 April by alleged members of NSAGs, resulting in the death of 13 civilians. Other forced movements had previously been reported at the end of March in the commune of Tamou, affecting over 1,800 people (244 households), and in Filingué between January–February 2024, affecting over 2,300 people (492 households). Since January 2024, it is estimated that over 30,000 people (4,535 households) have been forced to move as a result of armed conflict (OCHA 29/04/2024).

Displacement from Mali has been constant since 2012, when internal conflict erupted in the country, and has since spread to neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso (SeeD 06/03/2024). In Burkina Faso, a military coup in 2022 increased disputes among armed groups for control of the territory. By 2024, half of the territory was no longer under the control of the central Government and the insecurity caused by the presence of NSAGs was driving migration to neighbouring countries. Alongside an NSAG presence, the Government's presence in Tillabéri region is weak, increasing insecurity and border control problems (SeeD 06/03/2024).

The presence of the Wagner Group, a private military company, has also played a key role in destabilising the security situation in West Africa, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali (BBC 20/02/2024). The Wagner Group arrived in Burkina Faso after the French military forces left, following the Junta's demand for their withdrawal, in February 2023 (Krym Realii 01/11/2023; The Africa Report 25/01/2024; France 24 20/02/2023; Africanews 28/03/2024). Since December 2023, under the control of the Junta and Wagner Group, the Malian Armed Forces have engaged in counterinsurgency operations in Mali's central and northern regions, resulting in the killing of civilians (HRW 28/03/2024). The Wagner Group's presence has increased forced displacement in West Africa (SD 07/10/2023).

The Tillabéri region is also vulnerable to environmental hazards, such as floods and high temperatures, severely affecting communities' access to crops, cattle, water, and natural resources. NSAGs have seen this as an opportunity to position themselves as alternative service and relief providers in places where governments are weak or unresponsive (SeeD 06/03/2024; OCHA 19/07/2023 and 28/10/2023). Decreasing access to natural resources and increasing climatic shocks have also pushed people to move within Niger (SeeD 06/03/2024; IFRC 13/11/2023).

Crisis impact

Food security

In Tillabéri, lower income households that have run out of cereal stocks and have few income-generating opportunities are experiencing IPC 3 levels of food insecurity and are engaging in food-related coping strategies. There is limited access to production sites, which constrains access to food, livelihoods, and market garden production (FEWS NET 6/04/2024).

Education

93.4% of all the schools closed countrywide are in the Tillabéri region, where 879 primary and secondary schools have remained closed, depriving 7,566 students (48% girls) of their right to education and access to school food programmes (WFP 02/04/2024; UNICEF 13/04/2024).

Protection

The Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin and Islamic State Sahel Province NSAGs have a strong presence in the Tillabéri region, increasing humanitarian needs and causing displacement to other regions, such as Agadez and Maradi (Journal du Niger 16/04/2024; ACLED 17/01/2024). This trend risks overwhelming both the country's capacity and humanitarian organisations' ability to provide adequate assistance to those affected. Constant bombings and attacks between NSAGs put both refugees and host communities at high protection risks. Between January–March 2024, fires were reported in the Sanam central school and Tombo Zarma, affecting the security and continuity of education for over 700 students (UNICEF 13/04/2024).