In two separate incidents a week apart, four aid workers and a security guard were kidnapped along the same road in Nigeria’s north-eastern Borno state. A video released on social media shows the blindfolded men begging for their lives. In a second video a voice is heard telling ‘the infidels’ to ‘repent and turn to God’, before one of the hooded gunmen orders the rest to shoot, coldly executing all five hostages. Referring to themselves as ‘soldiers of the khalifa’, the perpetrators likely belonged to Boko Haram.

This Insecurity Insight document provides information on aid workers¹ reportedly kidnapped in 2020. It is based on incidents identified in open sources and verified information submitted by Aid in Danger partner agencies. This data is available on HDX.

**SUMMARY**


- Reported incidents peaked in June, when 30 aid workers were kidnapped in Mali (10), Niger (10), Nigeria (7), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (2) and Syria (1).

- Most kidnappings involved one aid worker or small numbers of up to three. In Niger, Somalia and Afghanistan multiple aid workers in groups of five or more were kidnapped at the same time.

- Named perpetrators include Al-Shabaab (Somalia); Ambazonian separatists (Cameroon); Boko Haram/Islamic State in West Africa Province, Fulani tribesmen, and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (West Africa); Tahrir al-Sham and Hurras al-Din (aka Guardians of Religion Organisation, affiliated with Al-Qaeda) (Syria); Houthi rebels (Yemen); Katiba Macina (Mali); Mai-Mai Mbulu, Mayi-Mayi Buhirwa and Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba (DRC); and the Taliban (Afghanistan).

**REPORTED KIDNAPPING INCIDENTS AND AID WORKERS AFFECTED**

This graph shows the number of incidents in which aid workers were kidnapped and the number of aid workers who were kidnapped between January and December 2020.

![Graph showing the number of incidents (66) and aid workers kidnapped (160) over the months of 2020.](image-url)}

**ACCESS THE DATA ON HDX**
LOCATIONS OF AID WORKER KIDNAPPINGS

- Over a quarter of aid worker kidnappings were reported in the DRC (19 incidents), 80% of which targeted INGOs. Kidnappings were also frequently reported in Mali (10) and Nigeria (7).

- Nearly two-thirds of aid worker kidnappings took place in road ambushes as aid workers were travelling to and from project sites. Other kidnappings happened at project sites, during home invasions, at illegal checkpoints and at an NGO compound.

- Aid vehicles were hijacked in Burkina Faso, the DRC, Mali and Nigeria. Of these 11 incidents, almost half ended in ransom payments and the release of the kidnapped aid workers who staffed the vehicles.

Reported kidnapping incidents, by country
This map shows the locations of incidents in which aid workers were kidnapped between January and December 2020.

KNOWN STATUS OF KIDNAPPED AID WORKERS

- In most cases kidnapping victims were freed after a short period of several days. In Iraq three French aid workers and their Iraqi colleague were held for a month before being released unharmed.

- Eighteen aid workers were killed in captivity in Cameroon, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen. All were male. In one incident seven Somali aid workers working for a LNGO were kidnapped from a health facility and killed in Somalia in May; their bodies were found the next day. Boko Haram executed five aid workers after kidnapping them in two separate incidents in June along the same road in Borno state, Nigeria.

- There is no information about the whereabouts of 64 kidnapped aid workers.

Known status of abducted aid workers
This graph shows the proportion of aid workers who were released following their abduction (shown in orange) relative to those who were killed (shown in red), or who remain missing or whose status is unknown (shown in grey) in countries where five or more aid workers were reportedly kidnapped.

The total number of aid workers kidnapped per country is shown in brackets after each country's name.
PROFILE OF KIDNAPPED AID WORKERS

- Twenty-nine of the reported 66 kidnapping incidents affected staff from national organisations, 27 INGOs and three UN agencies.
- National aid workers were the target of kidnappings in 69% of reported kidnapping incidents. There were seven reports of international aid workers being kidnapped.
- Almost all of the kidnapping victims who were killed were national aid workers. The exception are two international volunteers who were kidnapped and killed in Yemen in March 2020.
- Almost four times as many men were kidnapped as women, and all 16 aid workers killed in captivity were male. At least nine women were kidnapped in Burkina Faso, the CAR, the DRC, Mali, Nigeria and Somalia.

YOU MAY BE INTERESTED IN

Aid in Danger Bi-Monthly News Brief: An overview of safety, security and access incidents that affect aid workers, aid agencies and the delivery of aid. It is compiled from open sources. View


Security Incident Information Management (SIIM): Collecting, recording, analysing and using safety and security incident information to maintain staff security, safety and access to beneficiaries. More information

Mobile Guides: Our mobile guides have been designed in collaboration with the Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation and are available on DisasterReady! Current guides include: Emergency Healthcare in Insecure Settings; Responding to Sexual Violence in the Aid Workplace; SIIM for Staff and SIIM for Organisations. More information

Podcasts: The Humanitarian Incidents podcasts are a series of conversations with experts from Geneva to South Sudan discussing how to understand, manage and use of information on incidents, how this can improve organisations’ risk management and access to crisis-affected populations. Listen

This document is part of the Aid in Danger project. It is published by Insecurity Insight and funded by USAID through Save the Children US. The available open-source and partner-verified information is an indication of the number of aid workers kidnapped in 2020. However, no claim is made that the total number of aid workers affected has been documented or is known.


1 In our coding an aid worker is defined as an individual employed by or attached to a humanitarian, UN, international, national or government aid agency.