

The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Niger

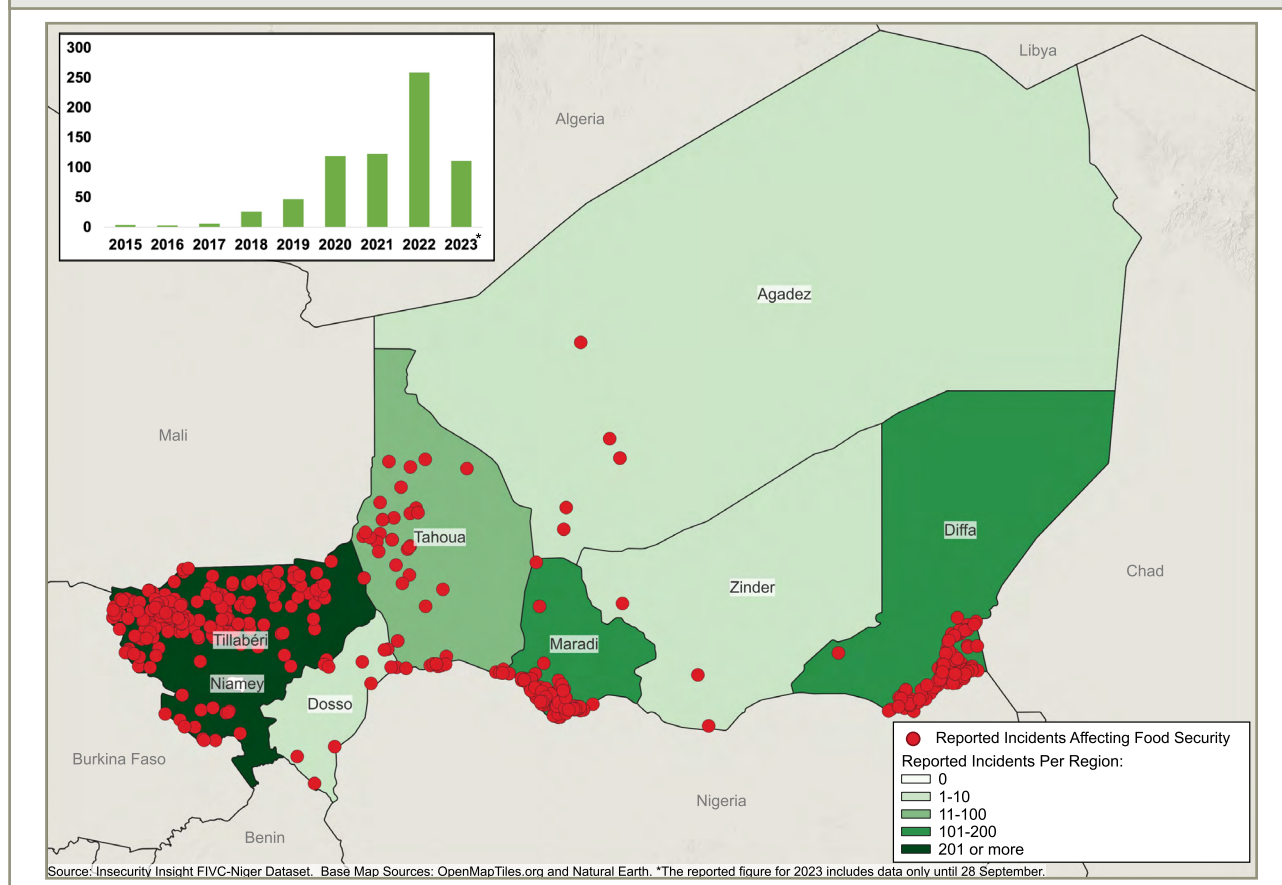
Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access

October 2023



This report forms part of a **series** examining the links between conflict and hunger. It focuses on reported conflict events affecting food security in Niger between 1 January 2015 and 28 September 2023. The analysis is based on the Food Insecurity and Violent Conflict (FIVC)-Niger dataset, an event-based dataset compiled by Insecurity Insight from open sources and partner contributions for this period. This data is available on **HDX**. The analysis is supported by key informant interviews and surveys conducted remotely with NGOs in Niger in August and September 2023. Among reported incidents are those involving the looting (i.e. stealing) of livestock; the burning of granaries and markets; killings and abductions of farmers, pastoralists and fishers; and violent clashes between sedentary farmers and nomadic pastoralists.¹ Restrictions imposed on cross-border movements following Niger's military coup in July 2023 have led to the suspension of some food aid deliveries and have exacerbated difficulties for civilians in accessing food, especially members of vulnerable demographic groups.

Figure 1: Locations of reported conflict incidents with clearly foreseeable consequences for food security in Niger, 1 January 2015-28 September 2023 (697 reported incidents)



Key findings

- At least 697 conflict events directly affecting food security were reported in Niger between 1 January 2015 and 28 September 2023. There has been a marked increase in reported incidents in the past three years. Over 85% of all incidents have occurred since the start of 2020 alone.

- Almost 90% of all incidents reported between 2015 and 2023 were in three regions of Niger: Tillabéri, Maradi and Diffa. High incident numbers were also reported in Tahoua, despite key informants highlighting that severe access restrictions are likely to have created considerable reporting barriers.
- Approximately 60% of all reported incidents involved the looting of livestock, mainly cattle, but also sheep, goats and camels. Owing to the centrality of livestock to the livelihoods of pastoral and agropastoral communities, this has had severely negative consequences. Simultaneously, it has created a vicious cycle that helps to perpetuate conflict violence by providing revenue for armed groups, which sell the livestock they have stolen.
- Other commonly reported incidents included violent clashes between farmers and pastoralists; the burning of granaries, especially in the Tillabéri region; and killings and abductions of farmers, pastoralists and fishers.
- In addition to conflict events directly affecting food security, general insecurity has created considerable restrictions on farmers' and pastoralists' ability to access their farmlands and therefore on their ability to grow and harvest crops and graze livestock. This has also intensified tensions between farmers and pastoralists.
- The military coup of July 2023 and subsequent sanctions imposed by ECOWAS has exacerbated challenges for civilians in Niger. Food prices have risen and restrictions on the movement of goods, especially across the borders with Nigeria and Benin, have further undermined food availability. In some cases these pressures have led to civilians adopting negative coping strategies such as foregoing meals and prematurely harvesting crops.
- NGOs have felt uncertain about their freedom to act in accordance with humanitarian principles following the **declaration** at the end of August 2023 by Niger's military government that NGOs are not permitted to operate in zones where military operations are under way.

I. Introduction

During the 2023 lean season from June to August at least 3.3 million people were **estimated** to be acutely food insecure in Niger, i.e. 13% of the population.² A further 7.3 million people (28% of the population) were estimated to be moderately food insecure and at risk of acute food insecurity if faced with significant shocks.³ Niger's food insecurity is long running. The ***2023 Global Report on Food Crises*** noted that the country had "qualified as [experiencing] a food crisis" in all seven annual editions of the report. However, the situation has deteriorated in recent years. The number of people in Niger assessed as being in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) phase 3 or above during the June-August 2022 lean season was **71% higher** compared with the 2021 peak in October-December. This set a new record in **Cadre Harmonisé** (CH) reporting for the country.

The causes of Niger's long-term food insecurity and the recent deterioration are complex, interlinked, and multifaceted. Contributing factors include **climate change**, desertification, land degradation and flooding, all of which have damaged and destroyed crops and vital assets, especially in the past three years. The country's food insecurity also relates to Niger's status as being among the world's poorest countries. It recorded the world's **third lowest**

Human Development Index score in 2021, with many civilians having limited financial power to purchase food or invest in improved agricultural equipment and systems.

Food prices in Niger have also risen considerably in recent years. The Ukraine crisis, a drought in 2021, disruptions to global food supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic and, most recently, sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) following Niger's military coup in July 2023 have all contributed to increased food prices. In June 2023, even before the coup, average prices for millet, one of Niger's main staple foods, were **44% higher** compared with June 2019. As of 24 September 2023, average millet prices in Niger had **risen by a further 6%** compared with the week before the coup, while those for rice had increased by 21%, sorghum by 18% and maize by 13% over the same period.

Simultaneously, Niger has remained **dependent on food imports**. Certainly, for the most heavily consumed cereals – millet, sorghum, maize and fonio – the majority (96% in 2022) are produced locally in Niger. Yet for others, such as rice, which is particularly important in urban diets and accounted for 10% of all cereals consumed in Niger in 2022, this is not the case. Indeed, 83% of Niger's rice supplies were imported in 2022, mainly from India and China via Nigeria and Benin. Such dependency has prevailed despite the majority of Niger's population practising pastoral, agropastoral or agricultural livelihood activities. One of the results of this dependency has been an increased vulnerability to external shocks such as when India announced a rice export ban in July 2023. This ban is likely to have contributed to the 17% increase in average rice prices in Niger in a single week following the coup in the same month.

Conflict violence in Niger has also severely affected food insecurity. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported an increase in incidents of conflict violence every year between 2015 and 2022, with the exception of 2021. Overall, such incidents increased from 55 in 2015 to 572 in 2022.⁴ The country faces insurgencies from Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) militants in the west of the country, especially in the Tillabéri region, and from Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) militants in the south-eastern Diffa region.⁵ In the Tahoua region bordering Tillabéri and Mali, banditry and IS Sahel militancy have also affected security. Similarly, banditry, often involving groups that cross into Niger from Nigeria, has been particularly prevalent in the Maradi region. At the same time, disputes between farmers and pastoralists over access to land and water points have been recurrent, in some cases resulting in outbreaks of violence. Moreover, granaries and markets have been burned and destroyed; farmers, pastoralists and fishers have been killed and abducted; livestock has been stolen; and land has been made inaccessible for sowing and harvesting crops and grazing livestock.

Links between conflict violence and food insecurity

It is the contribution of conflict violence to Niger's food insecurity that is the focus of this report. The links between conflict and food insecurity are widely recognised. In 2018 the UN Security Council unanimously passed **Resolution 2417** acknowledging these links. Yet detailed information remains limited regarding how specific conflict events affect food insecurity and how their impacts vary across time and geographical location. As **two analysts** note, there are “fundamental data gaps” in the documentation and disentanglement of the links between conflict and food security. Closing these gaps is “essential for producing effective food security” policies.

This report is part of Insecurity Insight's **series** of studies that aim to help fill such knowledge deficits while expanding awareness and understanding of the links between conflict and food insecurity. In doing so, it seeks to help improve humanitarian food programming responses and identify anticipatory action that can be taken to mitigate emerging and foreseeable risks to food security arising from conflict violence. At a secondary level, by identifying conflict actions with foreseeable consequences for food security requiring enhanced precautionary measures from conflict parties that relevant actors can engage with, it aims to contribute to enhancing compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL).⁶

To achieve these objectives, this report used a mixed-methods approach involving the analysis of event-based data collected from open sources, key informant interviews and desk research. It is divided into five sections. After this introduction, Section 2 provides background information on the political context in Niger. Subsequently, it analyses reported incidents with clearly foreseeable consequences for food security by geographic region (Section 3). Specifically, it focuses on Tillabéri, Maradi, Diffa and Tahoua, which are the regions in which incidents were most frequently reported. Section 4 then considers the implications of these incidents for food access and availability, as well as the broader insecurity created by conflict violence and various access restrictions created by such violence, as well as developments affecting food security since the July coup. Conclusions and recommendations are offered in Section 5 and Section 6 outlines and assesses the **methodology**. Appendix 1 briefly discusses the conflict parties adversely affecting the security situation in Niger, while Appendix 2 presents a World Food Programme satellite imagery analysis of cropland changes in the country.

2. The political context in Niger

Since gaining independence from French colonial rule in 1960, political instability has been recurrent in Niger. The country's history has been marked by coups in 1974, 1996, 1999, 2010 and, most recently, on 26 July 2023, when Niger's elected president, Mohamed Bazoum, was removed from power by a military-launched coup d'état and detained. He was replaced by General Abdourahmane Tchiani, the head of the country's Presidential Guard, as leader of a transitional government. Tchiani referenced a "**continually deteriorating security situation**" as a justification for overthrowing the country's civilian leadership. While it is true that **reported** conflict violence has increased overall since 2015, at the time of the coup there had been a reduction thus far in 2023 compared with the previous year.

Regardless of the accuracy of political assertions, the coup has increased instability in the country. At the end of July, ECOWAS issued a statement calling upon General Tchiani to cede power back to Niger's elected leader within a week or face the risk of **military intervention**. In response, Niger's military leadership is reported to have met with and **requested support from the Russian mercenary** force known as the Wagner Group. The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, is also said to have offered weapons to African nations, including Niger, to "protect themselves". The ECOWAS demands were not met, but the bloc has yet to follow through on its ultimatum. Arguably more significant, though, were the sanctions that ECOWAS announced at the end of July. Although Burkina Faso and Mali announced they would not apply these sanctions, the measures included suspending all commercial transitions between Niger and ECOWAS countries and the closure of land and air borders. The impact of these sanctions is discussed in Section V of this report.

There have been further concerns about the potential for increased activities by non-state armed actors in Niger following the security vacuum created by the preoccupation of Niger’s state security forces with a possible ECOWAS military intervention. These fears have been exacerbated by the announcement by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, in September that **France would withdraw** its approximately 1,500 troops from Niger, which started in early October. The troops had primarily been involved in countering the activity of Islamist armed groups in the Sahel. The move followed requests by Tchiani and **large-scale demonstrations** on the streets of Niamey, Niger’s capital, in which people often voiced support for the coup and Russia and anger towards France and the West.

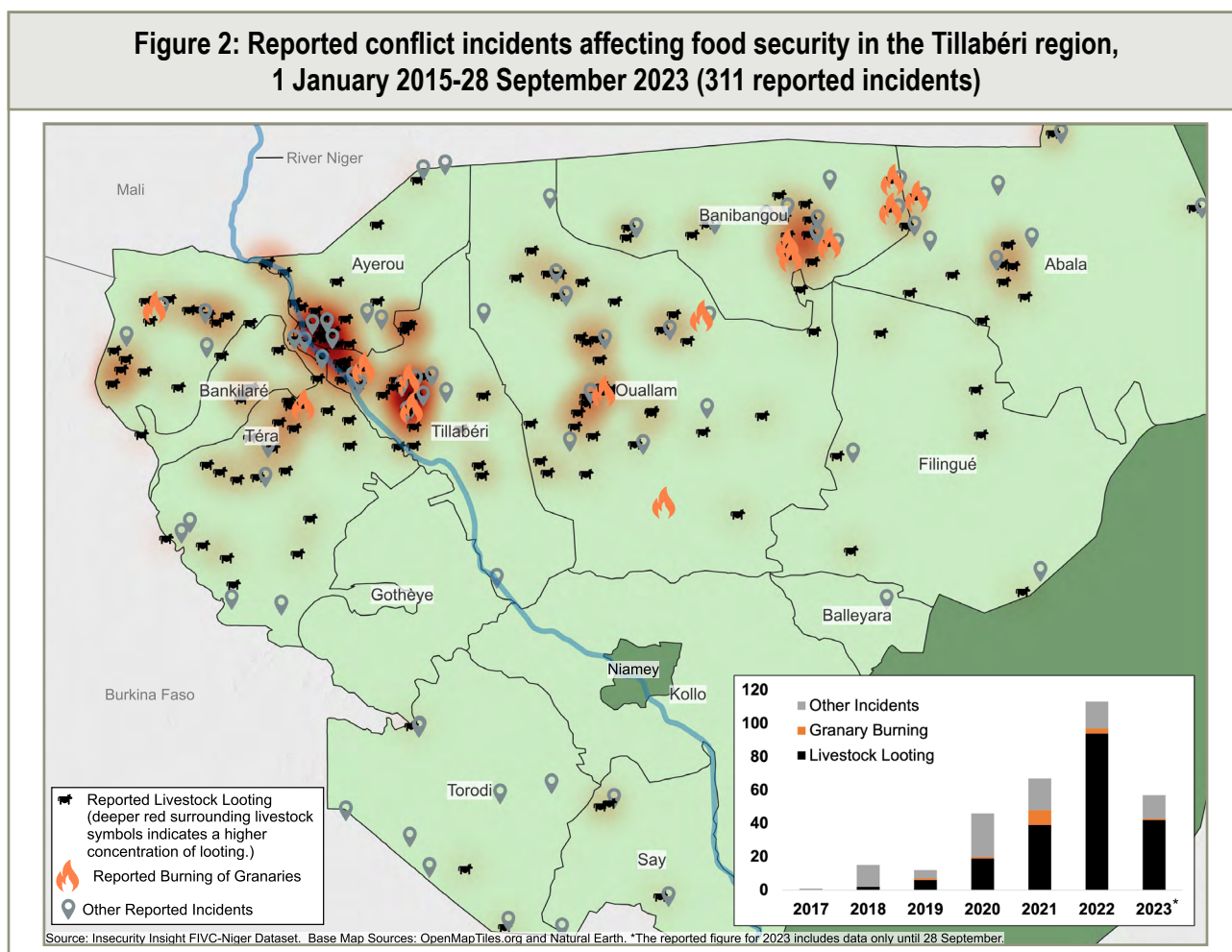
The coup has also created particular uncertainties for humanitarian actors regarding their ability to act freely in accordance with humanitarian principles. This followed the declaration of Niger’s military government at the end of August that all NGOs in the country would be required to cease their activities in zones of “military operation”.

3. Conflict events affecting food security in the Tillabéri, Maradi, Diffa and Tahoua regions

Forty-four per cent of all incidents across Niger were reported in the Tillabéri region, constituting the highest concentration of incidents in any single region of the country. Over 90% have been recorded since 2020 and occurred mainly in the northern half of the region. This trend is reflective of two factors. Firstly, it mirrors increases in broader incidents of conflict violence in Niger during this period. Secondly, it is a consequence of the fact that Tillabéri forms part of the tri-state Liptako Gourma region, which includes parts of eastern Burkina Faso and Mali and western Niger, and which has been at the centre of the Sahara Sahel crisis since 2012.

Reported incidents in the Tillabéri region

Figure 2: Reported conflict incidents affecting food security in the Tillabéri region, 1 January 2015-28 September 2023 (311 reported incidents)



Among the reported incidents in the region, those involving the burning of granaries are among the most notable due to the extent of the destruction of civilian infrastructure and food stocks this causes. At least 15 such incidents were reported, all except one of which were attributed to ISWAP, and occurred between 2019 and 2023. Tillabéri is the only region in Niger in which the burning of granaries was reported. Many of the incidents occurred within short time periods. Indeed, nine of the 15 recorded incidents were between March and May 2021, five of which occurred in the Banibangou department. Often, the incidents occurred in the context of wider attacks on villages in which civilian houses and huts were set on fire and, in some cases, livestock looted. A cause of considerable concern is that large numbers of granaries – more than 100 in at least one case – were reported to have been destroyed in single events, in some cases shortly after the harvest season, making it more difficult for people to replace lost food.⁷ The fact that granaries in Niger are often made of vegetable materials such as straw (see Figure 3) is likely to have facilitated the spreading of such fires, especially in hot weather.

The most recent incident of granaries deliberately being set on fire by conflict parties was recorded on 1 September 2023 in Doutkou Saraou in the Tillabéri department of the Tillabéri region. The attack is suspected to have been carried out by IS Sahel members, who also set fire to houses and looted cattle. Multiple farmers from the same village were also reported to have been **killed** by armed gunmen earlier in July 2023, and the village itself was reported to have been **attacked** in August 2023. This underlines the repeated and prolonged challenges that conflict violence has created for rural communities.

Figure 3: Examples of granaries in Niger



Image source: Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research, Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security

However, the most frequently reported incidents in Tillabéri were those involving the looting of livestock. These incidents accounted for approximately 65% of the total in the region. All such events have been recorded since 2018. Geographically, they were especially common in departments in the north-west of the region such as Ayerou, Tillabéri and Téra. IS Sahel militants were reported to have stolen livestock in approximately half of these incidents, all of which were recorded between 2022 and 2023. Incidents attributed to the group were especially common in the departments of Ayerou and Tillabéri, but were also spread more widely across the region. Other named perpetrators included JNIM and communal militias from ethnic groups that included the Fulani and Djerma communities.

Often, large numbers of livestock – several hundred in some cases – were reported to have been taken in single incidents. This is supported by the estimation of Tillabéri’s regional livestock directorate that **approximately 100,000 cattle were looted** in the region between 2020 and 2022. Such a high figure suggests it is possible that the reported incidents of livestock looting in the FIVC-Niger dataset under-represent the full extent of the problem.

In some cases the looting was accompanied by attacks on civilian infrastructure and, more frequently, the killing of civilians. For example, in March 2023 IS Sahel fighters reportedly looted livestock in the Dessa department of Tillabéri and also burned down an education college. Moreover, in at least 51 incidents in which livestock were looted, people were also killed, the vast majority of whom were reported to be civilians. The extent to which those killed were the owners of the livestock or pastoralists is unclear. Nonetheless, evidence from other regions in Niger (discussed in the following sub-section focusing on Maradi) suggests that people were sometimes attacked or killed at the same time that livestock was stolen in order to suppress opposition to such looting. As such, it is possible that many of those killed were the livestock owners who were dependent on their animals for their livelihoods and anxious to prevent them being stolen.

Among the remaining events, there were 37 reported incidents in which pastoralists were reported to have been killed and a further 15 in which farmers were killed. Some of these deaths occurred during intercommunal clashes between sedentary and pastoral communities in the communes of Ayerou, Dessa and Gorouol between 15 and 16 August 2023. The exact number of deaths from these incidents remains unconfirmed. Similar violent conflicts between sedentary and pastoral communities were also reported to have led to the **deaths of 17 civilians in Dessa and Ayerou** between 28 April and 2 May 2023.

A large proportion of the remaining incidents in which farmers or pastoralists were killed were attributed to various Islamist groups, including IS Sahel and JNIM militants, and were recorded between 2020 and 2022. They were spread widely across the region, but the contexts of and motives for the killings generally went unreported. However, some observers believe that gendered expectations associated with the roles of men and women in society linked to changing practices of who works inside and outside homes are likely to have played a role in motivating some of these killings.

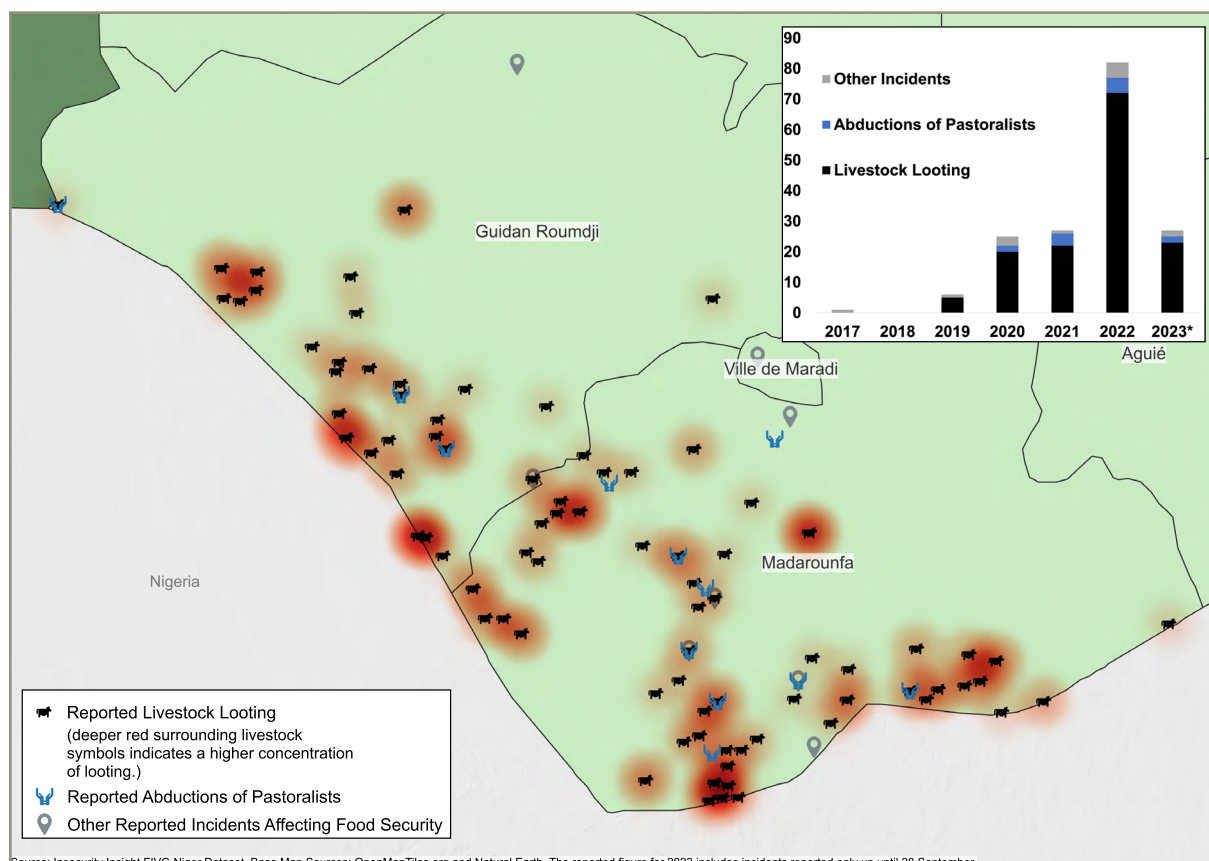
Reported incidents in the Maradi region

The second highest concentration of reported incidents occurred in the Maradi region, which since 2017 has been heavily affected by **banditry and criminality** originating from neighbouring areas of Nigeria, where cattle looting and kidnappings have occurred on a large scale. Such criminal groups have often acted with financial motives and targeted traders and influential people to demand ransoms. However, key informants believed that in recent years there had been a slight increase in activities by non-state armed actors from Nigeria with more political objectives.

The vast majority of incidents in Maradi were concentrated in the south of the region along the border with the Nigerian states of Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto. In this context, by far the most frequently recorded incidents were those involving the looting of livestock, which accounted for almost 85% of the 168 recorded incidents. All such incidents were reported between 2019 and 2023, and reached their highest levels in 2022, during which more than half of these incidents occurred. Geographically, all incidents were spread across the departments of Madarounfa and Guidan Roudjji, with livestock often being taken from close to the border with Nigeria. The names or identities of the specific conflict parties that were responsible for these incidents were not specified. However, **social media posts** and observations from key informants suggest that armed bandits from Nigeria are likely to have perpetrated many of the lootings, likely forming part of a **cross-border illicit trade in livestock**. As was apparent in Tillabéri, large numbers of livestock were taken in single incidents. A local publication estimates that **2,735 individual livestock animals were looted** in Maradi in 2021 alone. Furthermore, people were killed simultaneously with the looting of livestock in at least 18 incidents, and abducted in a further 17. One local media report claims that such killings and abductions in the region have been motivated by livestock looters seeking to “**neutralise resistance**” to their activities.

Among the remaining incidents reported in Maradi, in 13 of these pastoralists were reported to have been abducted, all of which occurred between 2020 and 2023. As can be seen in Figure 4, many of these abductions occurred in locations close to where livestock was also looted. Indeed, in at least five incidents, livestock was looted at the same time as the abductions. In three incidents Niger’s security forces were reported to have intervened to recover the abductees. Although the conflict parties carrying out the abductions were unidentified in all cases, key informants suggest they were likely conducted by bandits seeking ransoms and financial rewards.

Figure 4: Reported conflict incidents affecting food security in the Maradi region, 1 January 2015-28 September 2023 (168 reported incidents)



In other events in the region, two involved violent clashes between farmers and pastoralists. The exact location of one of the incidents is unclear. However, both were reported to have occurred in the southern half of Maradi during the main harvest season in November 2017, when at least three people were reported to have been killed, and November 2022, when the violence followed the moving of pastoralists' livestock onto farmland.

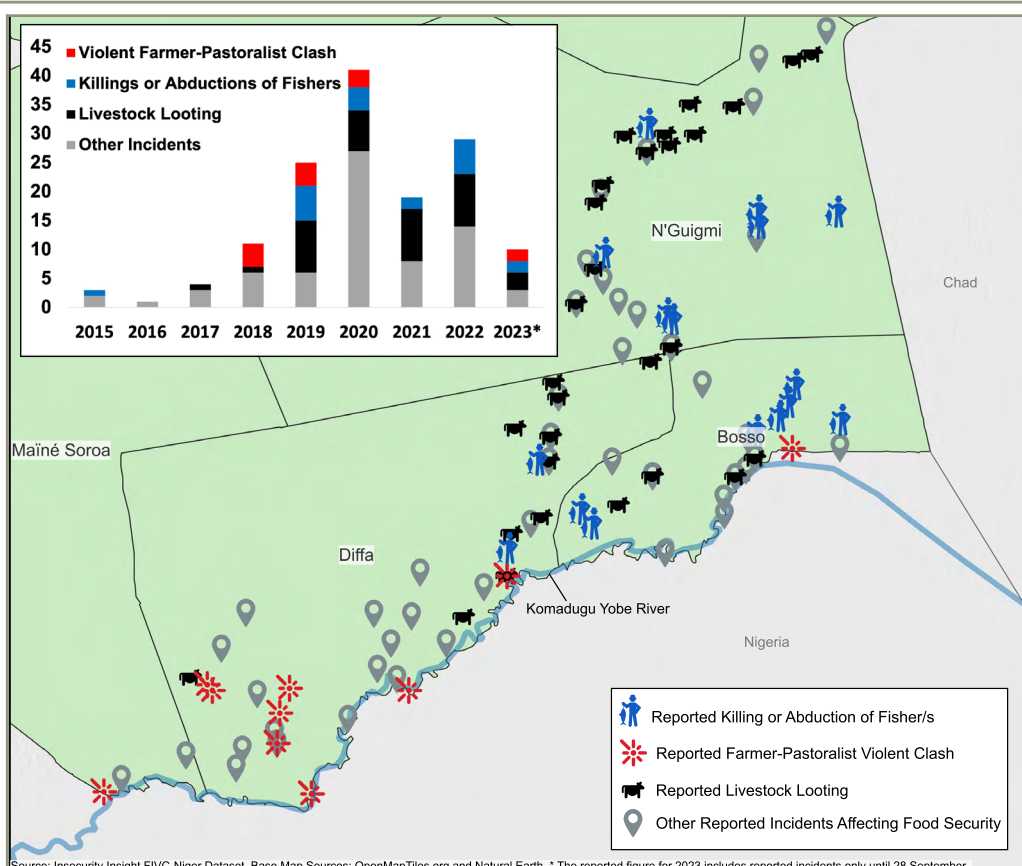
In a further incident, 12 civilians are reported to have been killed in February 2022 when a Nigerian air force attack struck a hamlet of the Fulani community, a group heavily involved in pastoralism. Officials later commented that the **air strikes** had been targeting "armed bandits" close to the Nigerian border, but that, tragically, they missed their target and instead hit the civilians.

Reported incidents in the Diffa region

A similar number of incidents to those in Maradi were reported in Diffa, the overwhelming majority of which were in the south-eastern corner of the region. Located along the borders with Nigeria and Chad and hosting fishers in Lake Chad and its islands in the south-eastern departments of Bosso and N'Guigmi, Diffa has been particularly **negatively affected by Boko Haram's** activities in the Lake Chad basin and violent attacks against civilians and state forces carried out by ISWAP since 2019. While the Komadugu Yobe River provides a source of water for irrigating crops, the region has also been affected by the river's flooding, forcing people to flee their villages.

The type of incidents reported in Diffa were more varied compared with those in Tillabéri and Maradi, where the looting of livestock comprised the majority of incidents. Nonetheless, livestock looting remained the most frequently reported type of incident in Diffa, with 39 such incidents reported, the majority of which occurred between 2019 and 2023. Thirty-three of the incidents were attributed to Boko Haram and/or JNIM militants, more than half of which

Figure 5: Reported conflict incidents affecting food security in the Diffa region, 1 January 2015-28 September 2023 (143 reported incidents)



Source: Insecurity Insight FIVC-Niger Dataset. Base Map Sources: OpenMapTiles.org and Natural Earth. *The reported figure for 2023 includes reported incidents only until 28 September.

were recorded in the N'Guigmi department between 2018 and 2023. In at least five of the incidents in which Boko Haram looted livestock, people were also reported to have been abducted by the group, the abductees likely being livestock owners or community members attempting to prevent such looting, as evidence from Maradi suggests.

Beyond the looting of livestock, at least 21 reported incidents in Diffa directly affected fishers, in 18 of which fishers were killed. Most often, the killings were attributed to Boko Haram militants, which have primarily carried out such killings since 2019. The exact motivations and contexts of the killings were not reported. However, key informants suggested that conflict parties operating from the Lake Chad islands have often attacked fishers because they view fishers as trespassing on territorial areas they consider to be under their influence.

Additionally, several of the killings of fishers were attributed to state forces, and at least two resulted from air strikes. In one incident in August 2021 it is reported that the Nigerian army arrested and killed 17 fishers by summarily executing them in the area of Baroua Gana, N'Guimi department. In July 2020 presumed Nigerian air force air strikes targeted the Lake Chad island of Kuliriram Koura, killing and severely wounding an unspecified number of fishers. Similarly, in May 2019, in a separate Nigerian air strike, a group of fishers and herders in the area of Kouata Mota in Diffa are reported to have been attacked. Three civilians were killed and others were wounded in this attack.

Farmers have also been affected by air strikes in Diffa on at least one occasion. In July 2017 it is reported that an air strike by Niger's military killed 14 farmers who had fled the village of Abadam on the Nigerian border due to insecurity. They had been attempting to return to the area to check on their crops and are reported to have been mistaken for jihadist militants.

There were also 13 recorded incidents of violent clashes between sedentary farmers and migratory pastoralists, all of which occurred between 2018 and 2023. While it is likely that reporting barriers have led to violent clashes between these groups being unreported, the figure is the highest in a single region in Niger among reported incidents. All but two of these incidents in the Diffa region were recorded in the department of Diffa, often in proximity to the Komadugu Yobe River. In several cases the clashes were accompanied by damage to and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. For example, in January 2018 at least three people were reported killed and two others wounded in clashes between farmers and herders in Koulo Koura, Diffa department, while more than 20 houses and vehicles were reported to have been set on fire. In at least one incident the violence was reported to have erupted due to herders' attempts to graze their animals in farmers' fields without their permission. The likelihood of such clashes between farmers and pastoralists in Diffa – and in Niger more generally – has been **heightened by increased desertification** over the past decade, which has led to migrations and forest clearance by farmers, thereby reducing the space available for pastoralists to carry out their traditional grazing practices.

There have also been several incidents of violence at markets. Arguably the most devastating was recorded as occurring during a night in December 2020 on the same day that **local and regional elections** were held. The market in the village of Toumour, which had previously been home to up to 60,000 displaced persons and refugees, was almost completely burned down by Boko Haram militants, together with up to a thousand houses, tents, sheds and vehicles. **Photographic evidence** in news reports suggests that livestock may have also been killed. In other incidents affecting markets in Diffa, a suicide bombing is reported to have occurred in February 2015 that left at least six people dead and several injured.

Despite not being identified in the FIVC-Niger dataset, key informants also referred to high civilian casualties (including among farming communities) in Diffa in recent years caused by conflict parties planting improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on routes likely to be used by Niger's security forces.

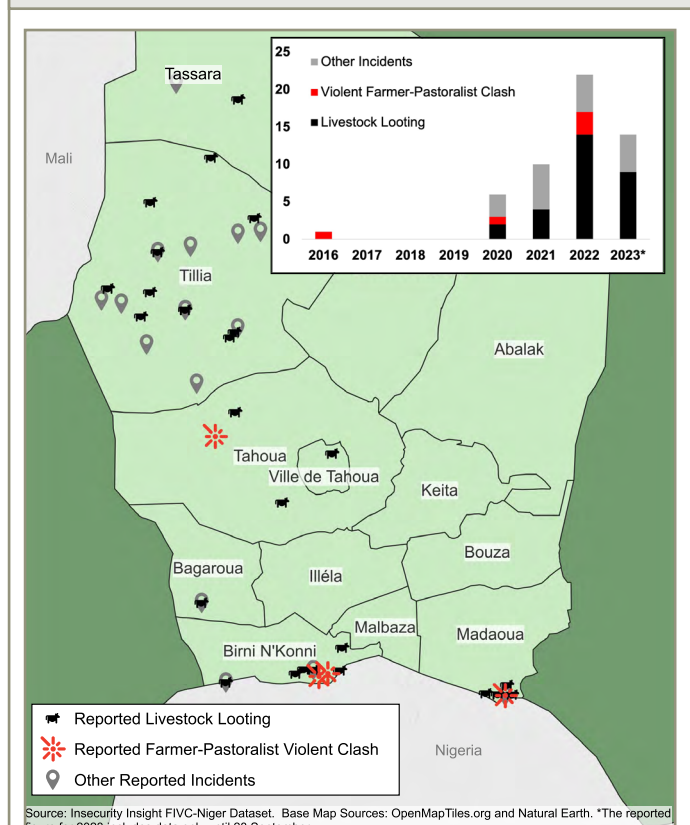
Reported incidents in the Tahoua region

At least 53 incidents with clearly foreseeable consequences for food security were reported in Tahoua region. However, key informants stressed that severe access constraints due to insecurity and the presence of fewer humanitarian actors in Tahoua compared with other regions of Niger make it likely that the reported figure under-represents the extent to which conflict violence affects food security in this area. The region borders both the Tillabéri and Maradi regions and Nigeria and Mali, both of which are the source of large numbers of forcibly displaced people in Tahoua.

Incidents involving the looting of livestock were the most frequently reported, with all such events occurring between 2020 and 2023. They were most often recorded in the department of Tillia, bordering Mali, which itself has witnessed **long-running and large-scale livestock looting** by armed groups participating in an illicit cross-border trade that helps to fund their activities. While conflict parties were not identified in the majority of incidents, named actors included IS Sahel and JNIM militants. In some incidents civilian populations were attacked at the same time as livestock was looted. For example, in February 2023 nine people were reported killed and one vehicle set on fire during an IS Sahel attack on a Malian IDP camp in which approximately 2,850 sheep and 30 camels were also looted.

There have also been at least five reported clashes between farmers and pastoralists in Tahoua. Three of these were recorded in November 2022 in the department of Birni N’Konni close to the border with Nigeria. Two farmers were reportedly attacked and wounded and their farmlands “devastated” when pastoralists equipped with machetes and batons attacked them. On the following day, clashes between farmers and pastoralists reportedly led to the deaths of four people and the wounding of three others in violence in a nearby settlement.

Figure 6: Reported conflict incidents affecting food security in the Tahoua region, 1 January 2015-28 September 2023 (53 reported incidents)

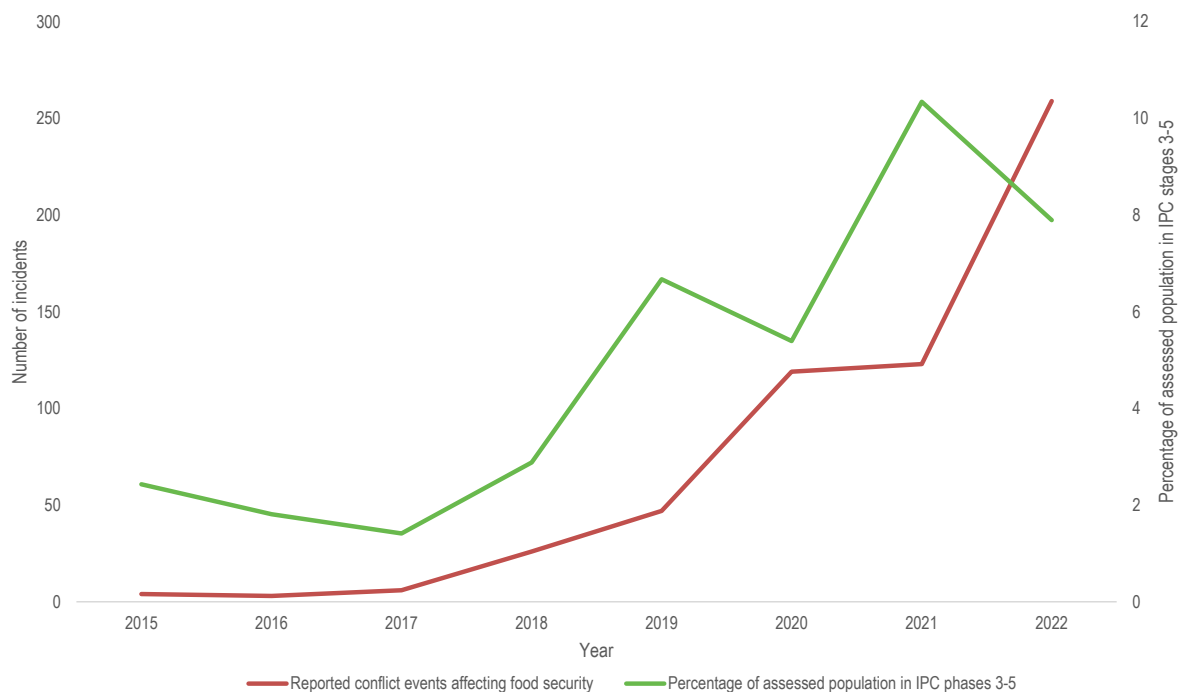


Pastoralists have also been affected by abductions in at least six incidents, mainly attributed to IS Sahel and often involving the looting of livestock. In one incident in August 2022 in Bagaroua department attributed to an unidentified armed group, a Fulani pastoralist was reported to have been abducted, and 150 ruminants and five cows looted. In at least two incidents the abductees were reported to have been released, including six that had been abducted in a single incident in November 2022.

The region has also been affected by violence at markets. The most recent incident was recorded in September 2023, when an individual from the Fulani community was reported to have fatally stabbed an off-duty military officer buying livestock in the village of Telemces, Tillia department. Two civilians at the market were also seriously wounded by security forces attempting to control the situation. It is thought that the individual who carried out the attack may have been motivated by the killed officer having previously arrested one of his relatives.

4. The impact of conflict violence on food security

Figure 7: The proportion of Niger's assessed population in IPC phases 3-5 during September-December and the reported number of conflict incidents affecting food security in Niger, 2015-2022



Sources: Insecurity Insight FIVC-Niger Dataset and West and Central Africa food security data, CH and IPC data, Food Security and Nutrition Working Group, accessed 13/09/2023

Discerning the links between specific conflict events and the availability of food, as well as civilians' physical and economic access to food, is complex. Among other factors, the nature of these links depends on the actors affected, their roles in Niger's food system, and the individuals dependent on these actors for supplying goods or services for food production and distribution. Moreover, some individuals and communities are more vulnerable to attacks on their livestock and private assets due to a comparative lack of external resources to mitigate their losses.

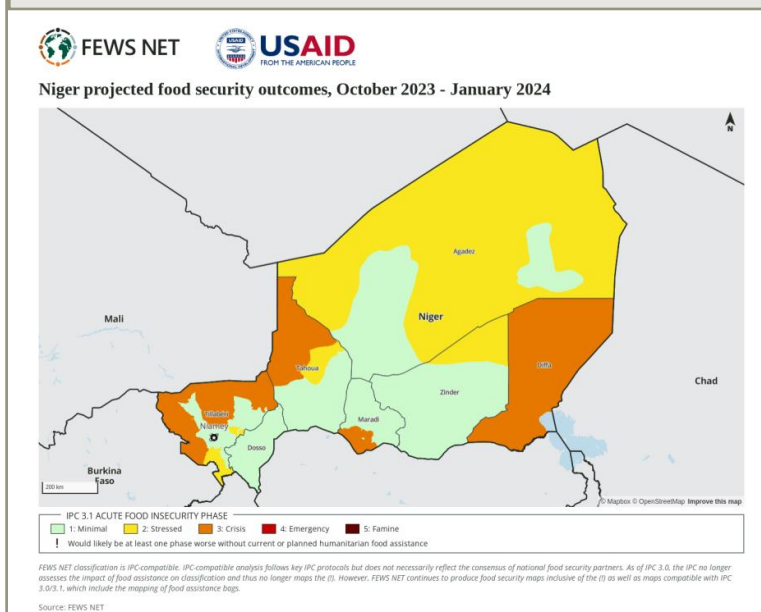
Nonetheless, it is clear that the overall impact of the reported conflict events on food security has been severely negative. As Figure 7 shows, between 2015 and 2022 there was a noticeable overall increase in both the percentage of Niger's population assessed as being in the IPC acute food security phases 3 (crisis) to 5 (catastrophe/famine) and the number of reported conflict events affecting food security. It is true that a notable anomaly in the overall trend occurred between 2021 and 2022, when the proportion of the population in IPC phases 3-5 fell by around 2%, despite a considerable increase in conflict events. This may be explained by three factors.

Firstly, intervening variables will have affected both food insecurity and conflict violence. For example, there was an improved harvest in the latter half of 2022 that saw cereal production in Niger **undergo a 65% increase** from 3,497,696 tonnes in 2021, when the country was hit by drought, to 5,791,641 tonnes in 2022.

Secondly, underscoring the complexity of the causal relationship between conflict and food security, the impact of conflict events will not always be manifested at the same rate as increases in food insecurity. For example, conflict events may have long-term impacts that motivate behavioural changes among civilians such as negative coping strategies (e.g. prematurely killing livestock or planting fewer crops), the impact of which reverberates into future harvests and seasons. Therefore, trend lines cannot be expected to run parallel at all times.

Thirdly, only considering the IPC figure for one period of the year provides a partial analysis due to variations in food availability during the lean season compared with shortly after the harvest. The September-December period was chosen to define the parameters for Figure 7 due to the availability of data for 2015-2022 and the ability to compare that date with annual conflict events for the same period. Yet, as noted earlier in this report, the IPC assessment for June-August 2022 saw a 71% increase in the number of people in IPC phases 3-5 compared with the peak in October-December 2021. Considering such data and seasonal variations therefore provides a more nuanced understanding. Breaking down the analysis by region and comparing regions affected by conflict violence against those that were not would also support this.

Figure 8: Projected food security outcomes for Niger, October 2023-January 2024



In sum, while the causal links between conflict and food insecurity are complex and not necessarily always linear, there was a clear overall trend between increased overall food insecurity and conflict events in Niger between 2015 and 2022. There are also notable similarities in the areas projected to experience the highest levels of acute food insecurity for the October 2023-January 2024 period shown in Figure 8 and the locations of the reported conflict events affecting food insecurity shown in Figure 1. It is likely that conflict violence contributed considerably to this pattern. The rest of this section discusses how conflict violence is likely to have increased food insecurity in Niger.

Looting of livestock and other incidents directly affecting food security

The looting of livestock has severe negative consequences for pastoralists and agropastoralists, because livestock are fundamental to their livelihoods. While it is rare that pastoralists in Niger eat meat from their own livestock, they generally consume and sell milk, and butter and cheese made from the milk. A survey of 14,200 households conducted in October 2022 in the regions of Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua and Tillabéri found that for 24.4% of these households the sale of livestock and their products (e.g. milk and cheese) was a principal income source. Among those in Diffa, the figure was as high as 51.5%.⁸ Moreover, key informants highlighted that some pastoralists have little if any physical money. As such, they observed that looting a herd of livestock from these pastoralists can be like stealing “everything they have in the bank”. One individual believed that the challenges for pastoralists caused by looting have contributed to some giving up this lifestyle and migrating

to urban areas. In some cases it is said to have led to pastoralists becoming dependent on food aid and, in the most extreme examples, even adopting negative coping strategies, including drug usage and prostitution.

The looting of livestock also has long-term reverberating consequences for food security by creating a vicious cycle in which the selling of looted livestock helps finance the activities of armed groups. Given the large numbers of livestock looted, this has the potential to provide conflict parties with vast sums of money. For example, the average price of a cow in Niger was 160,000 West African francs (equivalent to approximately US\$ 400) between the end of July and the end of August 2023.⁹ Evidence from Mali and Nigeria regarding cattle looting in the Sahel suggests that armed groups have used the cross-border illicit trade in looted livestock to fund the **purchase of weapons**. Key informants also testified that in some areas – notably in Diffa – armed groups have imposed taxes on pastoralists per head of livestock for permission to access territory under these groups’ control or influence, thereby increasing financial pressure on pastoralists. Moreover, the looting of entire herds of livestock is said to have been used as a threat to enforce the payment of these taxes. This further underscores the vicious cycle created by livestock looting and the extent to which it helps perpetuate violence and food insecurity.

While other incidents directly affecting food security were less frequently reported, they also have severely negative consequences for food availability and access. The burning and destruction of granaries and markets destroys food sources. In cases where granary burnings occurred shortly after harvest seasons, it is likely to have made the destroyed food especially difficult to replace. One individual from the Tillabéri region recalled the devastation of an attack on 14 December 2020 after over 100 granaries were burned:

“The granaries were full [when they were burned]. The harvest is in October, so everyone had harvested and stored the food in the granaries. There was millet, sorghum, green beans. They were full, full. Now it’s gone.”¹⁰

Meanwhile, killings of and injuries to farmers, pastoralists, and fishers have both prevented them from continuing to carry out their livelihood activities and reduced their capacity to do so. In turn, this has negatively impacted the communities for whom they provide by reducing the amount of food that has been produced and thus reducing their incomes and the availability of and access to food.

Broader insecurity: access restrictions and forced displacement

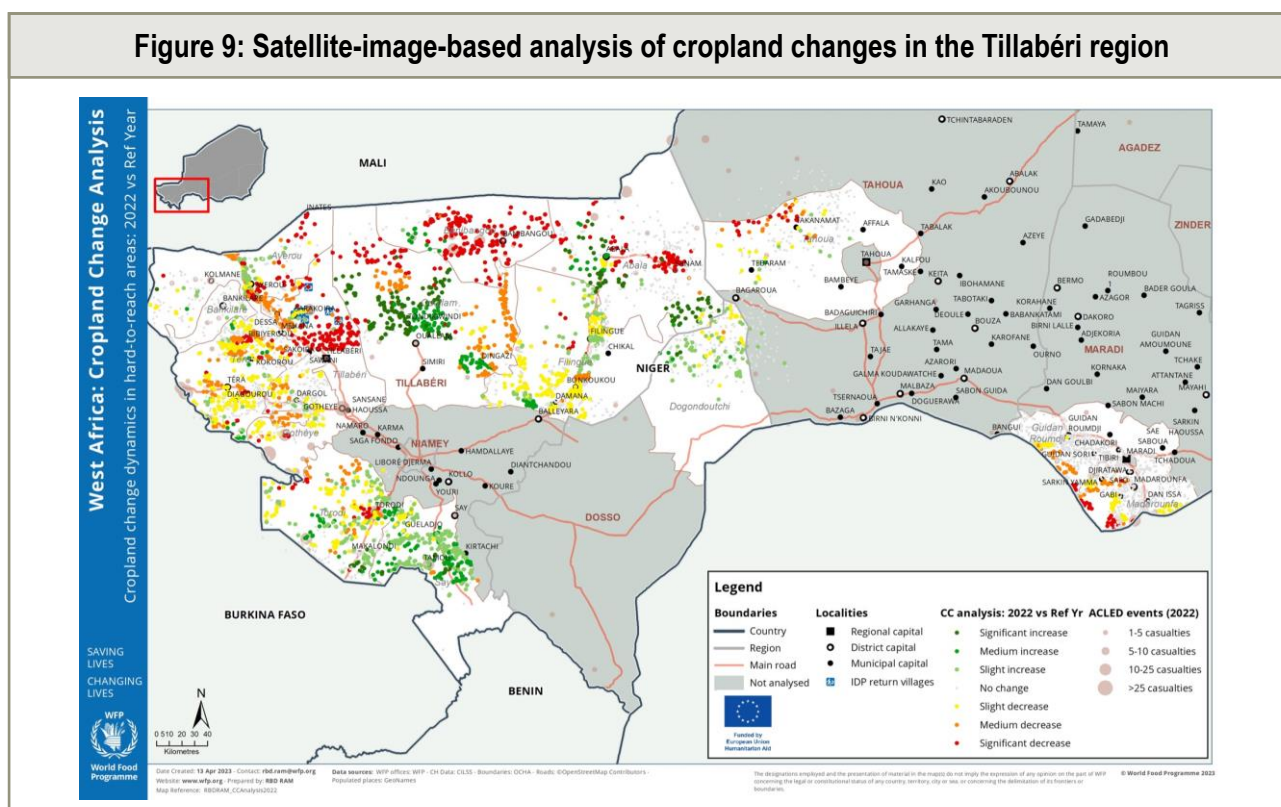
In addition to the conflict events directly affecting food security in Niger documented in this report, broader insecurity created by conflict violence has had severe negative consequences. This comes on top of the way in which farmers’ access to their farmland is often **restricted by flooding** during the rainy season from June to October. The negative impact of conflict violence is primarily due to the way in which it restricts farmers’ and pastoralists’ access to their land, preventing them from sowing and harvesting crops and the latter from grazing their livestock. Observers suggested that access restrictions had gradually increased since 2015 and have especially affected women, who have been threatened by armed groups with forced marriages and abductions. Not only are the access restrictions said to have contributed to reduced agricultural production because fewer crops can be sown and harvested, but they have also increased land degradation. This is due to livestock and crops being able to occupy increasingly smaller areas of land, which in turn becomes overused and increasingly degraded as a result. Simultaneously, key informants stressed that this had intensified tensions between farmers and pastoralists, whose livestock – due to reduced space for grazing – have become more prone to trampling on the crops of farmers and drinking from communal wells, a practice that is unsanitary for the people who draw water from the wells.

One key informant estimated that in the Tahoua region approximately 40% of grazing land was inaccessible as of August 2023. In particular, access restrictions affect farmers in the Diffa region close to the border with Nigeria and Chad, where armed groups based in the Lake Chad islands are said to prevent farmers from accessing their lands. It was noted that this situation has been exacerbated by these armed groups planting IEDs targeting Niger's security forces in the region. **Satellite imagery analysis** conducted by the World Food Programme has also found a particularly "significant" decrease in cropland coverage – which is an indicator of farmers' inability to cultivate crops – in Tillabéri (see Figure 9). Overall, 24% of localities in the region were affected by cropland decrease in 2022 compared with 2016, and 15% compared with 2021. The departments of Banibangou, Oullam and Tillabéri – which border Mali and Burkina Faso and have seen high levels of conflict violence, population displacement and cropland abandonment – were most seriously affected by cropland decrease, which ranged from 30% to 89% in these departments.

In contrast to the Diffa, Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, key informants stressed that access restrictions in Maradi have been more "sporadic". This was attributed to banditry predominantly having affected the region, in contrast to more violent forms of armed conflict carried out by groups with stronger political and territorial ambitions in other regions.

More general insecurity has had at least two further consequences negatively affecting food security. Firstly, it has disrupted trading activities, undermining the distribution of food and livestock. For example, **19 markets in the Tillabéri region** were reported to have been closed in June 2023 due to insecurity in the region. Not only does this immediately disrupt access to food for communities that rely on markets to purchase food, but it also has longer-term implications by reducing the incomes of traders and farmers selling crops, which in turn diminishes the funds available for them to invest in future agricultural activities and related resources.

Figure 9: Satellite-image-based analysis of cropland changes in the Tillabéri region



Secondly, conflict violence and insecurity have forcibly displaced civilians, frequently driving them away from their livelihood sources and making them dependent on host communities or food aid. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that approximately 708,000 internal displacements were triggered by conflict and violence in Niger between 2015 and 2022.¹¹ In some cases this displacement has resulted from conflict events directly affecting food security. For example, the reported **clashes between sedentary farmers and pastoralist communities** in Tillabéri in August 2023 were reported to have led to the mass displacement of over 17,500 people across the department of Ayorou. Moreover, key informants highlighted that some camps (e.g. in Diffa) created for internally displaced people have further reduced available grazing and agricultural land and exacerbated land access restrictions.

The July 2023 coup: ECOWAS sanctions, price rises and negative coping strategies

Following the coup and initial closure of Niger’s air space by the country’s military leadership, the World Food Programme (WFP)-managed UN Humanitarian Air Service temporarily suspended its flights.¹² Moreover, the WFP country director for Niger warned on 28 July that “if security” was an “issue”, the organisation would have to “temporarily possibly suspend certain operations in certain areas”, in words **reminiscent** of the WFP’s temporary suspension of operations in Sudan earlier this year. However, arguably the most significant suspensions of WFP activities have resulted from restrictions imposed on border crossings, which are of particular concern because **approximately 20% of cereals were reported to be imported before the coup**, with movement across the borders with Nigeria and Benin especially important in this regard. On 21 September the **WFP** reported that over 9,300 metric tonnes of WFP cargo (including specialised foods for treating malnutrition) intended for Niger and Burkina Faso (via Niger) was blocked between the port of Lomé in Togo and the border in Benin. Consequently, the WFP was forced to suspend supplementary feeding programmes to approximately 90,000 moderately malnourished children in the regions of Tahoua, Maradi and Zinder in Niger.

There are at least three further ways in which the coup and associated sanctions imposed by ECOWAS have negatively affected food security in Niger. Firstly, as has already been noted, they have led to increased prices for staple foods. While prices were reported to be more stable as of the end of September compared with the initially rapid increases in the first couple of weeks following the coup, they remained high. As noted earlier in the report, as of 24 September 2023 average prices in Niger for rice had **risen** by 21%, sorghum by 18%, maize by 13% and millet by 6%, compared with the week before the coup. These increases came during the lean season, when granaries are often empty and crops not ready for harvesting. Hence, prices were already higher than the average across the year as a whole.

Secondly, **Nigeria’s decision to cut the supply of electricity to Niger** – which was dependent on Nigeria for **70%** of its electricity as of 2021 – has disrupted a number of key food-related activities such as cooking and food processing. Key informants reported that traders have been unable to keep milk fresh because they cannot keep it refrigerated due to the electricity outages.

Thirdly, the added challenges following the coup have led to civilians pursuing negative coping strategies. Eight sex-disaggregated focus group discussions with 64 participants conducted by CARE in the Tillabéri region at the end of August 2023 had especially concerning **findings**. Communities described reducing the number of meals eaten per day, reducing the quality of food consumed, and prematurely selling crops and slaughtering livestock. These actions will likely have long-term negative consequences, reducing incomes and the quality and quantity of food produced. Moreover, half of participants had “scaled back” their livelihood

activities and 43% had “stopped livelihood activities altogether”. Women appear to have been disproportionately affected: among those who had stopped their livelihood activities “altogether”, 81% were women. Similarly, participants mentioned the sale of women’s livestock and crops twice as frequently compared with that of men’s.

Simultaneously, aid agencies have raised concerns about their ability to freely continue their activities following coup-related political changes. Key informants suggested that the appointment of military personnel as regional governors under the new political leadership could see humanitarian access reduced due to concerns among such officials that humanitarian organisations are cooperating with armed groups. Even before the coup, humanitarian actors in Niger faced severe challenges. These included **large funding shortages** following cuts to foreign aid budgets. In some cases, measures introduced by Niger’s government to address insecurity are also said to have had the unintended consequence of increasing costs for humanitarians. For example, one key informant reported that bans on the use of motorcycles in the regions of Tillabéri, Diffa and Tahoua had made it more difficult for communities to reach social services. It has also meant that NGOs have had to rent larger vehicles to reach civilians for data collection and other aid-related purposes.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

This report has documented a concerning overall increase in reported conflict events affecting food security in Niger between 2015 and 2023, especially in the regions of Tillabéri, Maradi, Diffa and Tahoua. Large-scale livestock looting has deprived pastoralists of their livelihoods while simultaneously helping to perpetuate violence by financing armed groups. Granaries have been burned down as part of wider attacks on rural communities in the Tillabéri region, destroying their reserves of staple foods. Farmers and pastoralists in the Tillabéri, Tahoua, Maradi and Diffa regions and fishers in Diffa have been killed and abducted. Meanwhile, increased access restrictions to grazing land has aggravated tensions between sedentary farmers and nomadic pastoralists, in some cases resulting in the outbreak of physical violence and deaths. While key informants highlighted tensions between farmers and pastoralists across Niger, incidents of physical violence between these two groups were reported most frequently in the Diffa region, but also in Tillabéri, Maradi and Tahoua.

Beyond the conflict events directly reducing the availability of food and civilians’ access to it, broader insecurity has also had devastating consequences. It has made grazing and sowing land inaccessible, especially in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions and the south-eastern parts of Diffa. As a result, farmers have been unable to sow crops and land degradation has increased. It has also forced markets to close and triggered large-scale displacement, often driving people away from their livelihood sources and making them dependent on others for support.

The coup has exacerbated these challenges. Prices have risen, the freedom of humanitarian aid agencies to act freely in accordance with humanitarian principles has been made uncertain, and some food aid deliveries have had to be suspended. With a resolution to Niger’s internal political situation and its relationship with the international community remaining only a distant possibility, clarity on many key aspects of life for the country’s people remains absent.

Long-term action is required to address the immediate, cumulative, and reverberating impacts of conflict violence on food security, while responding to emerging and foreseeable risks. Among others, these include those arising from the 2023 coup and seasonal variations in food availability.

Recommendations

The UN Security Council and international community should:

- Raise awareness of the long-term negative consequences of conflict for food security;
- Underscore that civilian objects, including those essential for food production, storage and distribution, must be protected from attack under IHL;
- Make all feasible diplomatic efforts to reopen borders between Niger and Nigeria and Benin to enable the free transport of food, aid, and goods and services crucial for food production and distribution;
- Make all feasible diplomatic efforts to restore a stable electricity supply to Niger; and
- Support Niger's government in addressing the looting and illicit trade of livestock within and across its borders.

Foreseeable and emerging conflict impacts should be anticipated where possible:

- In aid programming assessments and responses, enhanced attention should be paid to demographic groups such as women and children who are likely to be especially vulnerable to the impacts of conflict violence on food security.
- With Niger's main harvest season running from October through to January, attention should be paid to the potential for increased tensions between farmers and pastoralists in this period. Where security conditions allow, local mediators should be trained to help resolve conflicts involving traditional bodies, instead of using administrative or judicial bodies. There is **strong evidence supporting the use of mediators** to resolve disputes between farmers and pastoralists.
- Support should be given to farmers and pastoralists so that they do not feel pressured to adopt negative coping strategies that will reduce food availability and incomes in the long term.

International humanitarian law duty bearers should:

- Pressure conflict parties to take all feasible precautions to prevent the damaging or destruction of civilian objects such as markets and granaries; and
- Take steps to make all relevant stakeholders aware of the foreseeable consequences that their actions could have for food security.

Interested parties and key stakeholders should do what they can to mitigate security risks where possible to allow aid access:

- **Aid agencies** should monitor conflict incidents, threats of violence against their personnel and access difficulties to ensure the best possible understanding of their operating contexts. Where possible, this information should be shared with other aid agencies to help reduce the likelihood of further incidents and increase the chances of aid being delivered safely.
- **Researchers and analysts** should continue to monitor the ongoing crisis in Niger and publish their findings so that policymakers and humanitarian aid agencies have the necessary information to respond to the crisis in a targeted and context-specific way.
- **Civil society organisations** should lobby governments to adequately fund aid agencies and international organisations supporting the aid response in Niger.

6. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach allowed quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to complement each other.

The quantitative analysis involved the identification of conflict events with clearly foreseeable consequences for food security, which in turn were identified through a qualitative analysis of event descriptions extracted from ACLED and Insecurity Insight's Security in Numbers Database (SiND). After duplicate events were removed, they were classified according to the objects of attack in a given incident (e.g. livestock, granaries, farmers, pastoralists) and the method of attack (e.g. looting or theft, arson, abduction or kidnapping, the use of firearms). This method of classification builds on the schema provided by the **Monitoring and Evaluation of Food Insecurity in Conflict (MEFIC)** framework. However, this was adapted for the specific context in Niger, and conflict events with more indirect impacts on food security (e.g. attacks on transportation routes, roads and the civilian population at large) were excluded. This process produced the FIVC-Niger dataset. Conflict parties were named in this dataset, and the current report aims to support the development of constructive engagement, mitigation strategies, and the development of context-specific policies and responses at the local, national, and international levels.

This method of documenting conflict events is cost-effective and limits security risks for researchers while allowing reported conflict parties to be recorded. The event-based nature of the documentation also enables the detailed analysis of patterns of conflict actors' behaviour over time and by geographical location. In turn, this helps identify possible entry points to address such behaviour and mitigate the impact of violence on food security in the longer term.

However, there are also clear limitations to this approach. The incidents have not been independently verified and those in the FIVC-Niger dataset are only the ones that have been reported. They are therefore unlikely to be representative of all incidents that occurred during the assessed period. This is especially the case given the existence of reporting barriers. These include the fact that the majority of Niger's population were estimated to **lack access to the internet** as of January 2023 and that the livelihood activities of individuals affected by given conflict events are often unreported or unidentified. Given that **80% of Niger's population lives in rural areas** with livelihoods dependent on livestock, agriculture and natural resources, it is likely that many conflict events did directly affect farmers and pastoralists, but were not recorded as such. Furthermore, there are limitations in making direct numerical comparisons between reported incidents. For example, the impact of the looting of livestock on physical access to and the availability of food for a given community is different to that created by the burning of a granary. The impact also varies among incidents of the same category (e.g. the looting of livestock), because they occur in different contexts owing to intervening variables such as the accessibility of given communities to other sources of food and their levels of income and savings. As such, the event-based analysis in this document should be regarded as an analysis of patterns of behaviour that highlights key concerns requiring attention from the international community, IHL duty bearers and other relevant stakeholders.

To help address these limitations, key informant interviews were conducted to complement as far as possible the findings of the open-source research and provide greater understanding of the impact of specific conflict events on food security. Interviews were conducted virtually in August and September 2023. Additionally, a written survey questionnaire was conducted with NGOs operating in Niger during the same period. All interviewees and survey respondents have been anonymised.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary of named conflict parties

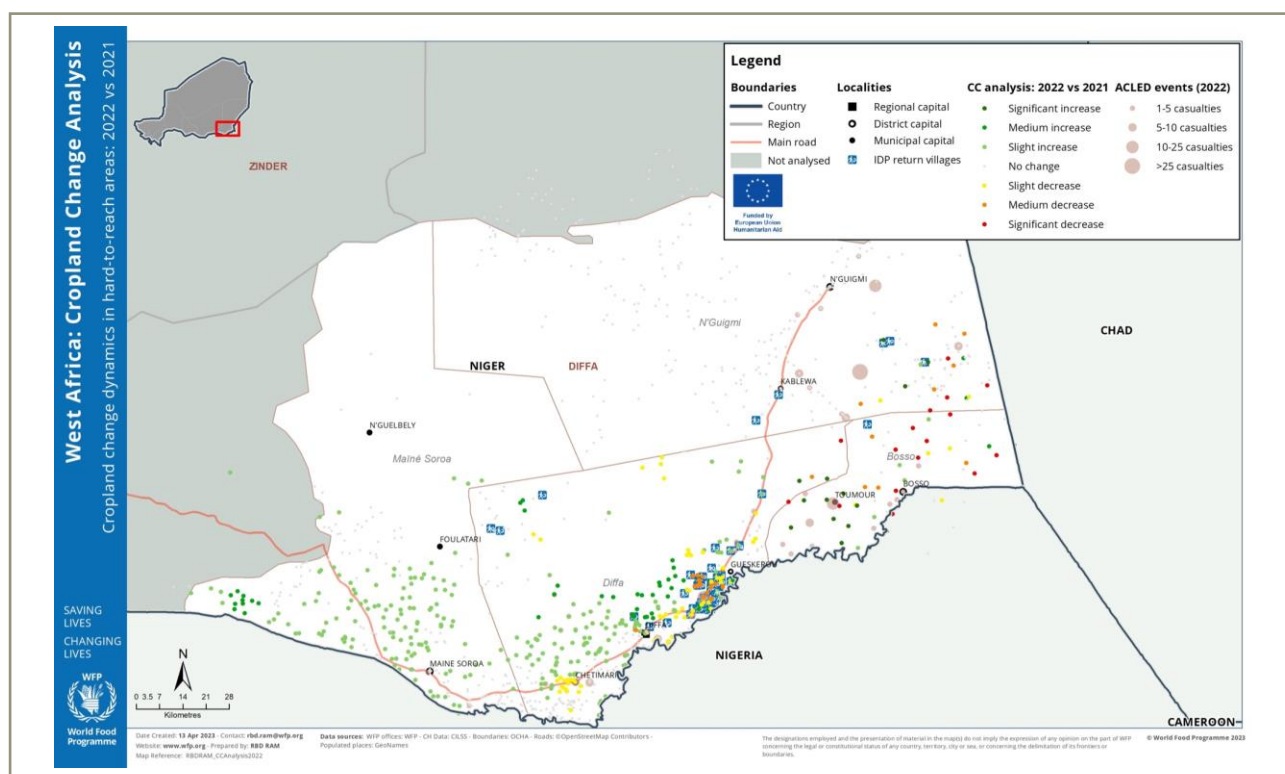
Boko Haram is a Sunni Islamist group that was founded in 2002 with the aims of opposing Western education and creating an Islamic state in Nigeria. Although it remains primarily active in north-eastern Nigeria, it has also conducted operations in Cameroon and Niger. In 2015 the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group, which led to a split within the group and the creation in 2016 of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which remains hostile to Boko Haram.

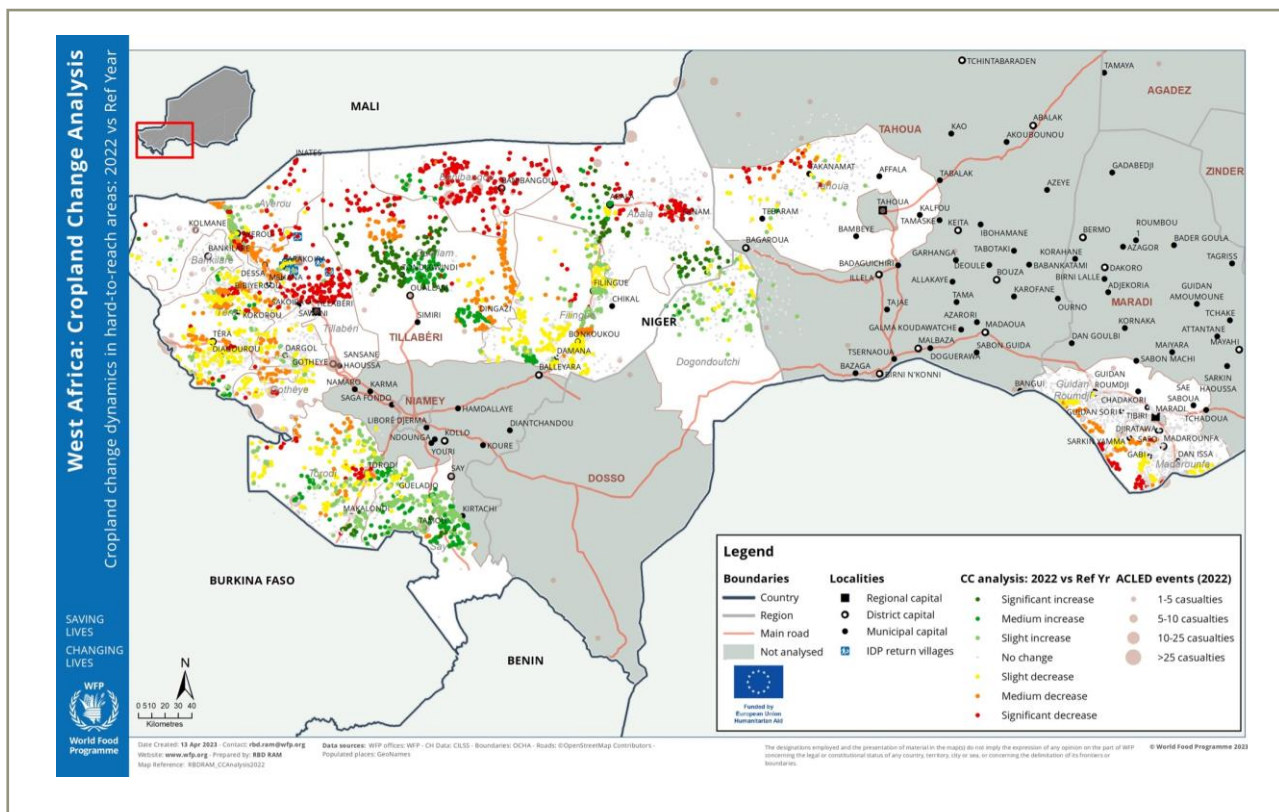
Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) was formed in 2016 as a result of the split in Boko Haram, which it has **violently attacked** since 2021. The group is primarily active in north-eastern Nigeria, but also operates in Cameroon, Chad and Niger to a lesser extent. It is affiliated with the Islamic State group.

Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) is a salafi-jihadist group and the Sahelian affiliate of the Islamic State group. Its origins extend **over a decade** to its de facto predecessor, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). However, the group in its current form was created in May 2015 and initially known as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and later as the Greater Sahara faction of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) from March 2019. This was before it was granted “provincial” status by the Islamic State group in March 2022 and became known as the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel). It is mainly active in the tri-state border areas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, but has also operated in Algeria, Benin and Nigeria.

Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, (JNIM)) is a coalition of al-Qaeda-aligned groups. Its **creation was announced** in March 2017 by the leaders of Ansar al-Din, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Mourabitoun and Katibat Macina. Acting with the stated aim of expelling foreign forces (especially French and UN) from Mali and imposing its version of Islamic law, it mainly operates in Mali, and to a lesser extent in Burkina Faso and Niger.

Appendix 2: WFP satellite imagery analysis of cropland changes in Niger





- 1 The terms “incident” and “event” are used interchangeably in this document.
- 2 The people in this category were assessed as being in phases 3 and 4 of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC).
- 3 The 7.3 million people in this category were assessed as being in IPC phase 2.
- 4 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), accessed 08/10/2023. The term “conflict violence” is used here to refer to what ACLED describes as “political violence”.
- 5 For further information regarding the distinctions between these groups, please see the glossary in Appendix 1 at the end of this document.
- 6 For further information on provisions in IHL relating to food security, see Insecurity Insight, “The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria”, Switzerland: Insecurity Insight, April 2023, p. 5.
- 7 Interview with Amnesty International, 30 April 2021; see also Amnesty International, Niger: “I Have Nothing Left Except Myself”: The Worsening Impact on Children of Conflict in the Tillabéri Region of Niger, 13 September 2021, p. 30.
- 8 Rapport Enquete Site Sentinelle 2022, “Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Crises Alimentaires”, p. 57.
- 9 This information was shared by a key informant.
- 10 Interview with Amnesty International, 30 April 2021; see also Amnesty International, “I Have Nothing Left Except Myself”: The Worsening Impact on Children of Conflict in the Tillabéri Region of Niger, September 2021, p. 30.
- 11 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Niger Conflict and Violence Data”, accessed 08/10/2023.
- 12 Niger’s airspace was reopened in early September 2023.

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