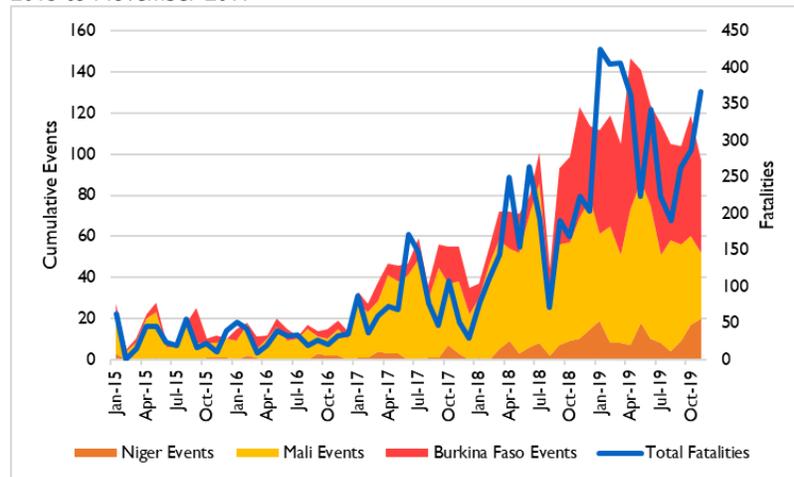


Urgent scale-up of assistance and access needed in conflict-affected central West Africa

The sharp uptick in conflict since mid-2018 (Figure 1) across the Liptako-Gourma region, an area encompassing western Niger, northern and eastern Burkina Faso, and central and northeastern Mali, has resulted in the displacement of nearly 700,000 people and has significantly disrupted typical livelihood and market activities. Conflict is expected to continue to drive high humanitarian assistance needs in 2020. Current estimates suggest that between 1.5 and 1.7 million people are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse across the region. Needs are anticipated to increase to 2.5 to 3.5 million people during the

Figure 1. Conflict events and fatalities in the Liptako-Gourma region, January 2015 to November 2019



Source: ACLED data

June to August 2020 lean season, a 50 percent increase from last year. An urgent scale-up of humanitarian assistance and unfettered humanitarian access is needed to meet the high current and expected needs.

Since the start of the year, the Armed Conflict and Location Event Data Project (ACLED) has recorded nearly 1,300 conflict events in the Liptako-Gourma region, resulting in 3,493 deaths. Most of these events have taken place in Burkina Faso, with slightly less than 600 conflict events across all 26 of its provinces in Liptako-Gourma. More than 486,000 people have been internally displaced in Burkina Faso, nearly 80,000 people in Niger, and more than 110,000 people in Mali. Additionally, roughly 76,000 refugees originally from the Liptako-Gourma region have fled to neighboring countries.

Insecurity and the resulting displacement have forced many households to either abandon their fields or to have limited access to fields for cultivation and harvesting. Preliminary national harvest estimates by the National Agricultural Statistics Directorate of Niger indicate that staple crop production in Tillabéry region of Niger will be up to 40 percent below average in the most conflict-affected departments. Based on national-level crop production estimates, FEWS NET expects that the most conflict-affected areas of Burkina Faso will be up to 75 percent below average and up to 35 percent below average in Mali. Results from the October 2019 National Food Security and Nutrition Survey (ENSAN) and sentinel site surveys in Niger indicate that in many areas of the Liptako-Gourma region, more than 20 percent of surveyed households (local populations, internally displaced people, and refugees) have either recently engaged in or exhausted the ability to sell productive assets, beg, or engage in illicit activities, which are coping strategies indicative of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes. This is in addition to information indicating that food consumption is deteriorating.

In response to the uptick in conflict, national governments' have put in place security measures that restrict typical pastoral movement, limiting access to typical pasture and water sources, as well as normal market functioning. This has resulted in the concentration of pastoralists near agriculturalists, driving further tension and the potential for conflict. The structure and overall functioning of markets has also been negatively affected, because insecurity has

driven out many market actors, including traders from neighboring countries, reducing the number of consumer goods available on markets, the demand for cash crops and livestock, and overall market activity. In Tillabéry region of Niger, five of the 12 key markets have recently experienced significant disruptions. Some medium to large reference markets along the Mali-Burkina Faso border in Mopti (Mali) and Sahel (Burkina Faso) regions and along the Mali-Niger border in Ménaka (Mali) region are experiencing significant disruptions that limit activity. Small markets along the border are experiencing higher degrees of disruption and some have ceased functioning.

Conflict in the region is expected to continue to drive displacement and disrupt households' access to food and income. There is the potential for increased conflict in mid to late 2020 as limited pasture and water resources are depleted and given restrictions on pastoralists' movement. Also, early household crop stock depletion among some households during this time will further drive higher levels of acute food insecurity. FEWS NET estimates that between 2.5 and 3.5 million people are likely to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse in the Liptako-Gourma region between June and August 2020. Areas of greatest concern include Soum, Oudalan, Loroum, Bam, Sanmatenga, Séno, Yagha, and Komondjoar provinces of Burkina Faso; Tillabéry, Flingué, Téra, Torodi, and Gotheye departments of Niger; and the region of Ménaka and the *cercles* of Ansongo, Gourma Rharous, Douentza, Koro, and Bankass in Mali.

Available information indicates that humanitarian food assistance is ongoing in parts of Burkina Faso, though distribution is often disrupted by insecurity and is therefore not regular. Humanitarian food assistance is expected to resume as usual in Mali and Niger during the lean season, though the assistance needs are likely to be higher than what is currently planned. Given the likelihood of continued conflict, already high humanitarian assistance needs, and expected further increases through late 2020, an urgent scale-up of assistance is needed. Unrestricted humanitarian access is needed to facilitate assistance delivery to those in need.