## Context

Niger has been confronted with a series of humanitarian crises. These have affected the areas surrounding the Nigerian border, particularly the region of Diffa, since 2015, and the areas adjacent to Mali, particularly the regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua, since 2018. These various crises have caused significant displacement among populations; there were 313,000 displaced people in Niger in September 2021 (OCHA 2021).

Population of assessed sites

Legend

Statut
- Host community
- IDPs
- Refugees
- Returnees

Population
- 25,000
- 5,000
- 1,000

The structural challenges that Niger is facing have been exacerbated by the deteriorating security situation. Niger is ranked in 189th (last place) in the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2020), and 40% of its population live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2018).

These structural challenges largely explain the low level of access to information and communication technologies (ICT). Overall, the mobile penetration rate in Niger is very low. In 2018, 79% of households had access to a mobile phone, and only 6% had internet access (National Institute of Statistics, 2018). However, these overall figures hide significant disparities between urban and rural areas, where the ICT penetration rate is even lower.

Despite national studies, very little data is available on ICT access and use, specifically in areas affected by conflict (Diffa, Tillabéri and Tahoua). This constitutes an obstacle to planning a humanitarian response. To bridge this gap, the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) and the World Food Programme (WFP), with the technical support of REACH and funding from the Luxembourg government, have carried out an evaluation with the aim of 1) understanding ICT needs and user habits among communities; 2) identifying knowledge gaps in communities concerning connectivity of phone services; 3) understanding the challenges that communities face in accessing ICT services; 4) defining the ICT training required to help communities.

LUXEMBOURG AID & DEVELOPMENT etc EMERGENCY TELECOMMUNICATIONS CLUSTER REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action
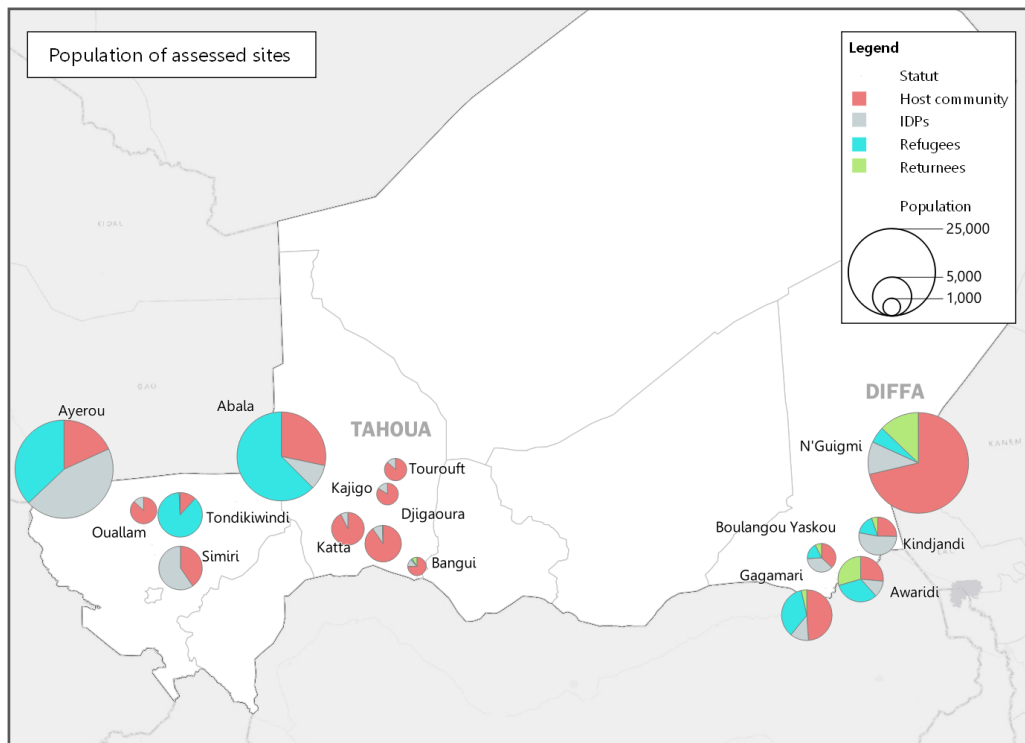
Methodology

The evaluation was carried out in two stages: first in Diffa, between 26 June and 12 July 2021, and then in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, between 30 August and 3 September 2021. In total, 15 areas (five per region) were evaluated, specifically Awaridi, Boulangou Yaskou, Gagamari, Nguigmi, and Kindjandi (in the Diffa region); Abala, Simiri, Ouallam, Ayerou and Tondikiwndi (in the Tillabéri region); Kajigo, Tourouft, Katta, Bangui Peul and Djigaoura (in the Tahoua region)[1]. The evaluation was based on a mixed methodology. The quantitative component, based on simple random sampling, studied 1,560 people including host populations, IDPs and refugees living in the areas above, by means of individual questionnaires.

The sampling was calibrated in order to obtain an error margin of +/- 10% and a confidence level of 95% in each area. Furthermore, the quantitative component studied 69 key informants, including phone and accessory retailers, internet service providers and energy products salespeople. They were selected through purposive sampling and answered questions on the situation in their communities. The qualitative component contained 71 focus groups, which were carried out in the communities, and 44 one-to-one interviews with salespeople. The complete methodology note is available here, and the data collected is available here.

Population by age and sex
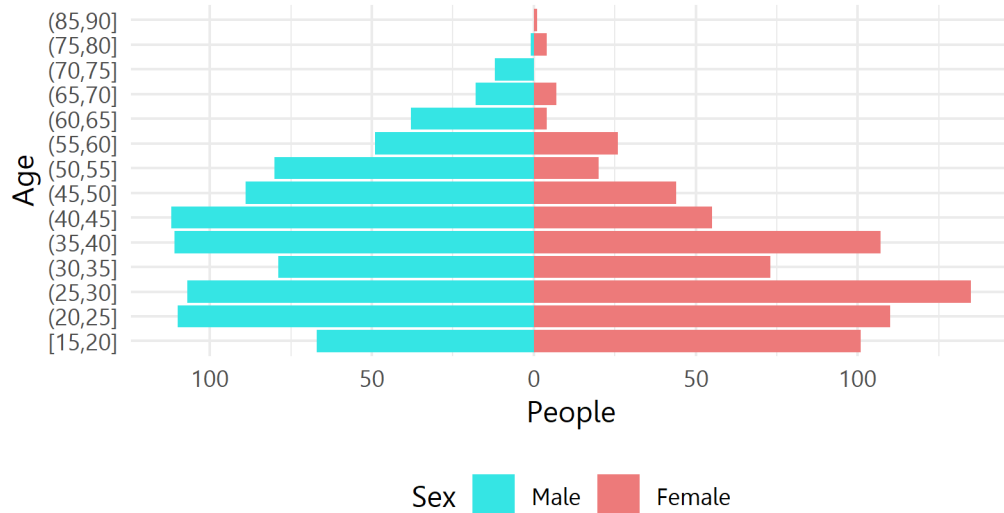
There are exclusively over-18s in the [15-20] category.

Population by status
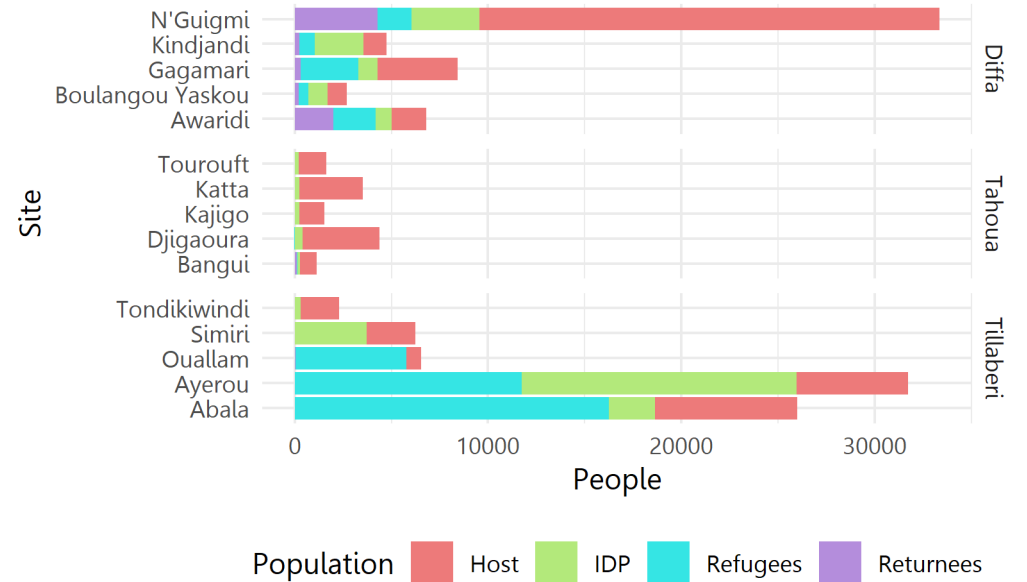
1 Kajigo, Tourouft, Dijigaoura, Simiri, Tondikiwndi and Katta no longer exist today, as they were temporary sites.

Key results

Adequate coverage in most areas

The evaluation measured network coverage by the four phone providers in Niger (Airtel, Moov, Sahelcom and Zamani). In 12 of the 15 areas, network coverage is sufficient - e.g. it allows users to open a video - with at least one of the four providers. While some providers have a better network, others have no network at all in up to 10 of the 15 areas. That said, at least three of the areas have severely weak network coverage. In Tondikiwndi, the weak network means that users cannot open a YouTube video, while in Kindjandi and Boulangou Yaskou, it is just about possible to make a WhatsApp call, although the voice is often not clear, regardless of the network provider used.
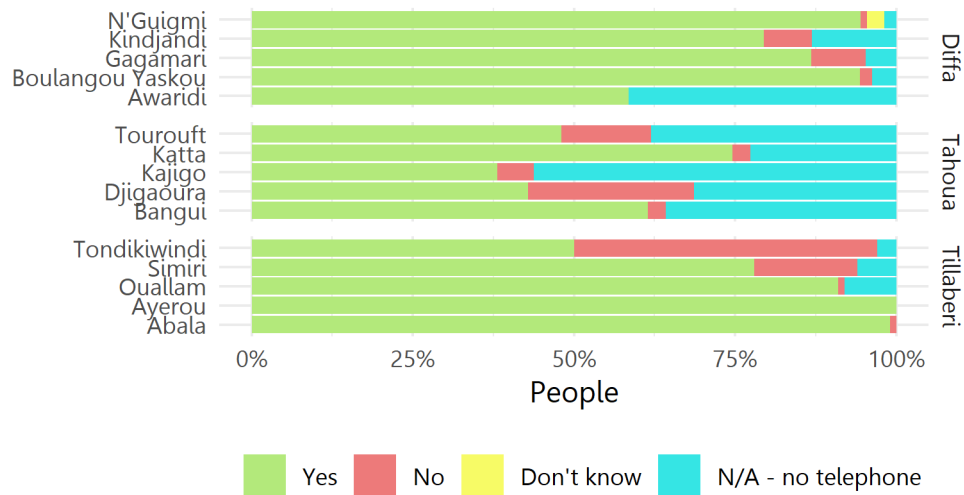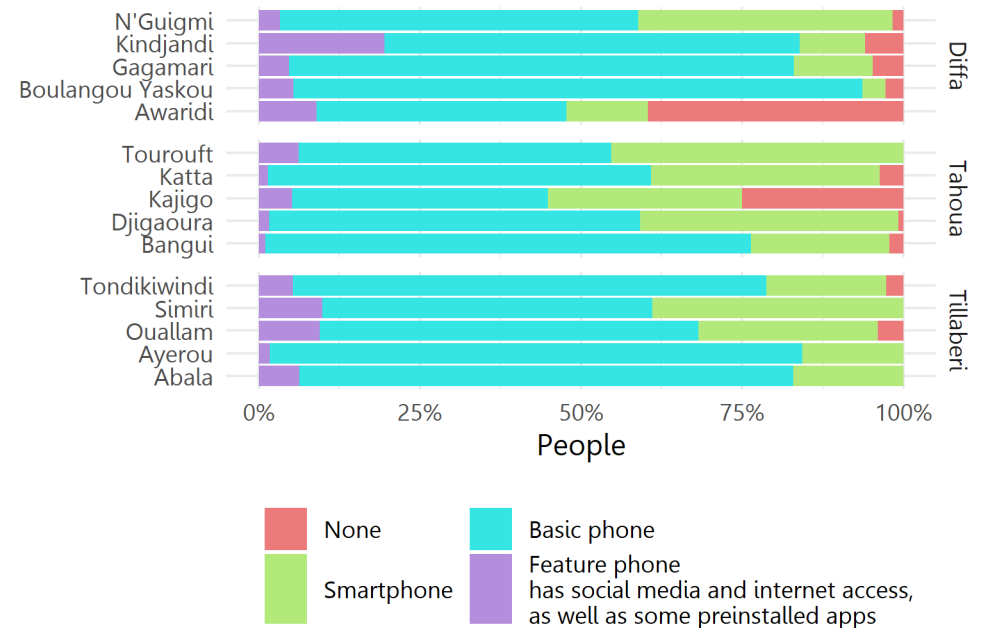
Basic phones over smartphones

The use of a mobile telephone is rooted in the habits of communities, no matter the population group. In the majority of the areas, almost everyone interviewed said that they had access to at least a basic phone, either because they owned one, or because they can use a device that belongs to a member of their household or a neighbour. However, this data hides a strong geographic disparity. While in Tourouft, Simiri, Ayerou and Abala most people had access to a basic phone, in Kajigo and Awaridi, 40% and 25% of those interviewed stated that they have no access to a phone, not even a basic model.

People who have a telephone

Mobile network coverage at home

Legend (Mobile network coverage at home): Yes, No, Don't know, N/A - no telephone

Legend (People who have a telephone): None, Smartphone, Basic phone, Feature phone has social media and internet access, as well as some preinstalled apps

However, access to a smartphone, or at least a feature phone which can access social media and the internet, remains generally more limited. While in certain areas, half of those interviewed said that they have access to a smartphone or feature phone, as in Tourouft (52%) and Simiri (49%), this percentage drops to as low as 9% in other areas, such as Boulangou Yaskou. The basic phone therefore remains the most popular choice, and the use of internet-based ICT services is still very limited.

Overall, more men said that they have access to a phone than women, even if the difference is not significant. However, this basic level of access hides a reality that is much more complex. Men are in control of technology in the household; phone numbers were much more often registered in the names of the men who were interviewed than the women. In Tondikiwndi, where the situation is the most extreme, only 8% of women said that their phone number is registered in their name, compared to 37% of men.

People who have a telephone by sex
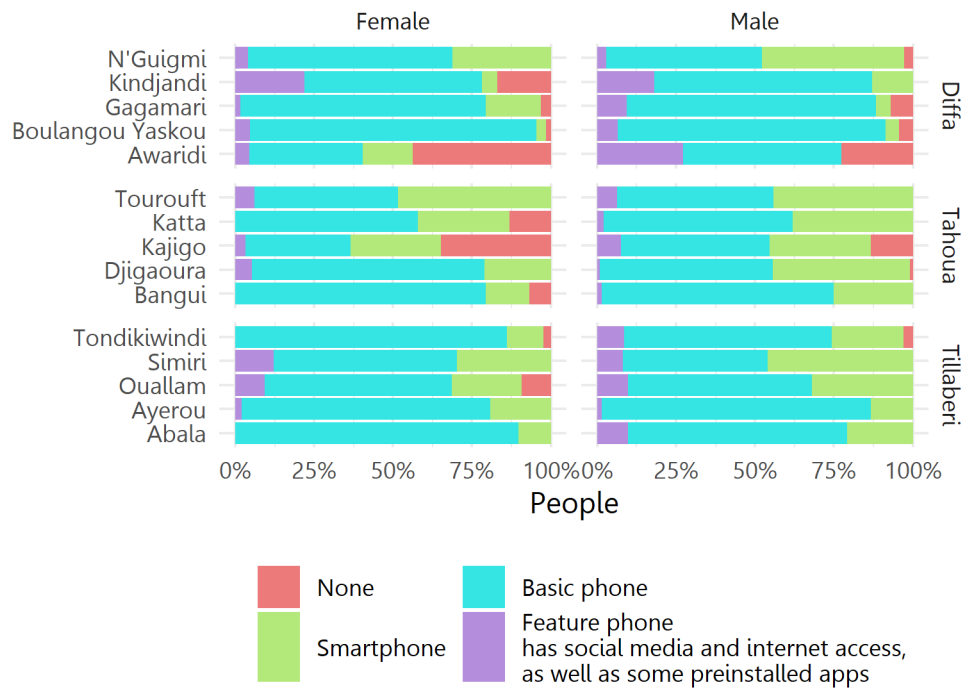
In whose name is your main phone number registered
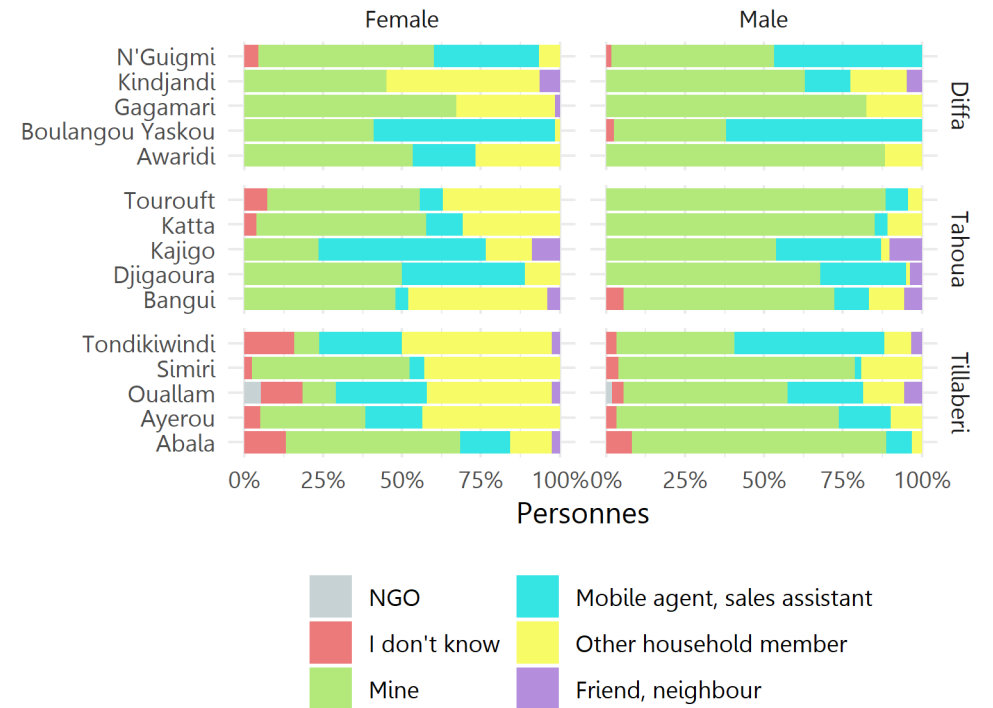
Telecommunication: an unaffordable service

By far, the main reason for not owning a phone and not using mobile internet is cost, regardless of the population group and area. Consequently, 81 out of 107 people interviewed who do not own a mobile phone said that the cost of purchasing a device is too high.[1] In the case of accessing mobile internet, there is also a clear financial barrier. Of 1,014 people who responded to the study who do not have mobile internet access, 453 stated that the cost of a phone that can access the internet is too high. [2]. Other costs associated with using a phone, such as purchasing credit, even if marginal, also contribute to making telecommunication an unaffordable service for a large proportion of the population. In this respect, focus groups also highlighted that a reduction in call and internet costs would be the most desired method of support to resolve difficulties in accessing ICT.

Other obstacles (secondary)

Other factors, such as the weak digital culture, also play a role. This role is marginal in regard to the use of a mobile phone. Only 16 out of 107 people interviewed who do not have a mobile phone said that they do not have one because they do not know how to use such a device[3]. However, the situation seemed to be different in the case of using the internet, for which a low level of ICT skills seems to play a more significant role. Out of 1,014 who responded to the study stating that they do not have access to mobile internet, 405 mentioned not knowing how to use the internet as a reason[4]. However, it is likely that this lack of skills is the consequence of limited access to ICT services, rather than the other way around. Other reasons, such as the lack of phone network coverage, protection of personal data, a lack of interest in using ICT services, etc. seem to only concern a small minority of the population.

The three main reasons why you do not own a mobile phone
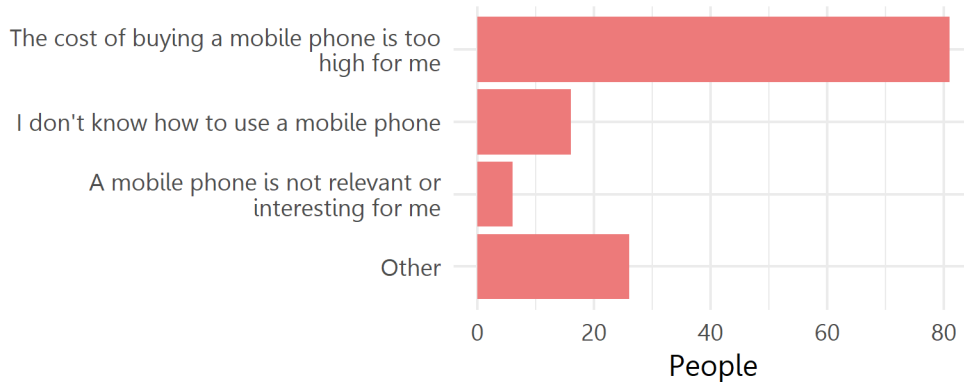
The three main reasons why you do not use mobile Internet
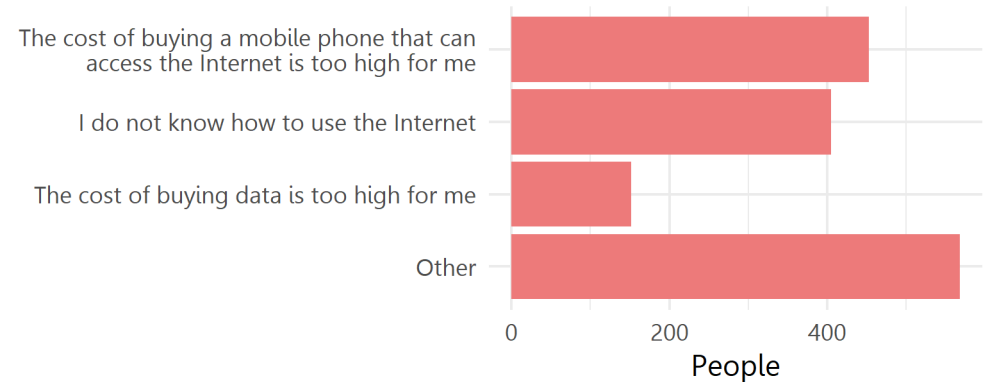

1, 2, 3, 4 As the question was multiple choice, those interviewed could give multiple reasons.

Although half of those who have a phone stated that they are unable to charge their phone at home, this is not seen as a major problem. Charging points (solar-powered or via power generators) appear to be an effective alternative. These charging services must be paid for, and vary between 50-200 CFA francs, depending on the location. However, charging points are primarily available in urbanised areas, with many areas lacking the service altogether. This is the case in N'Guigmi, Gagamari, Boulangou Yaskou, Djigaoura and Simiri, where those interviewed stated that they had to travel long distances to access charging points.

In a context where purchasing a phone is unaffordable, people could access ICT in public spaces that offer these services. In almost all of the areas, however, no one said that they use services such as internet cafés, phone boxes, or mobile phone renting services, either because they do not exist or they are too far away.

Use of private commercial charging points
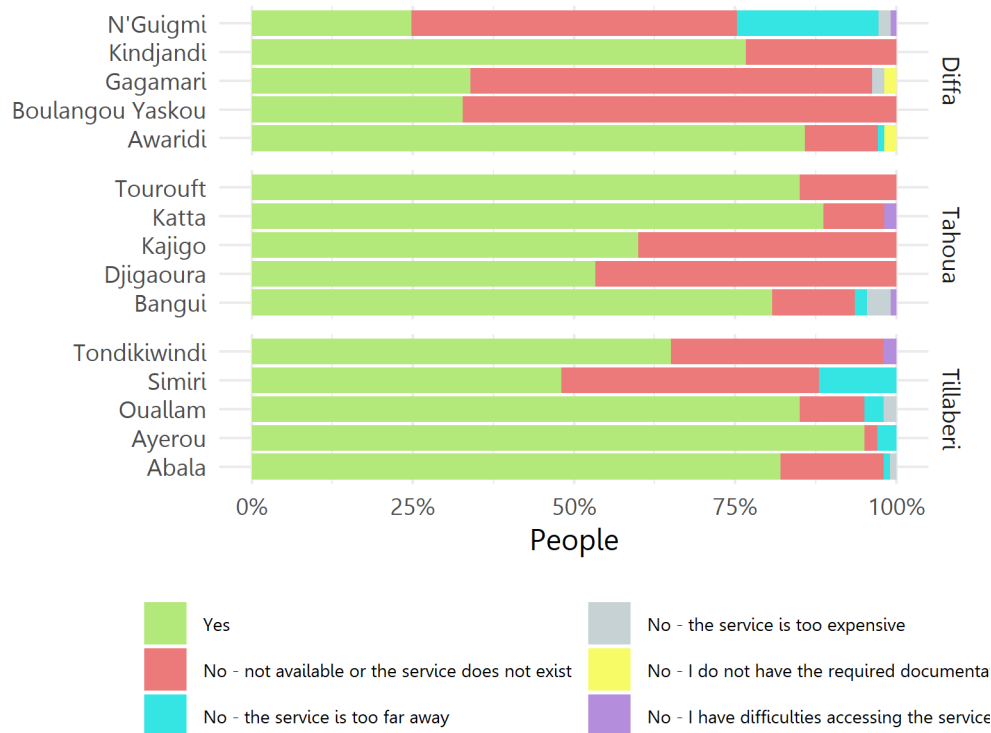
Use of internet cafés to access the Internet (...), etc.