

Maradi: a concerning new emergency situation on the Niger-Nigerian border

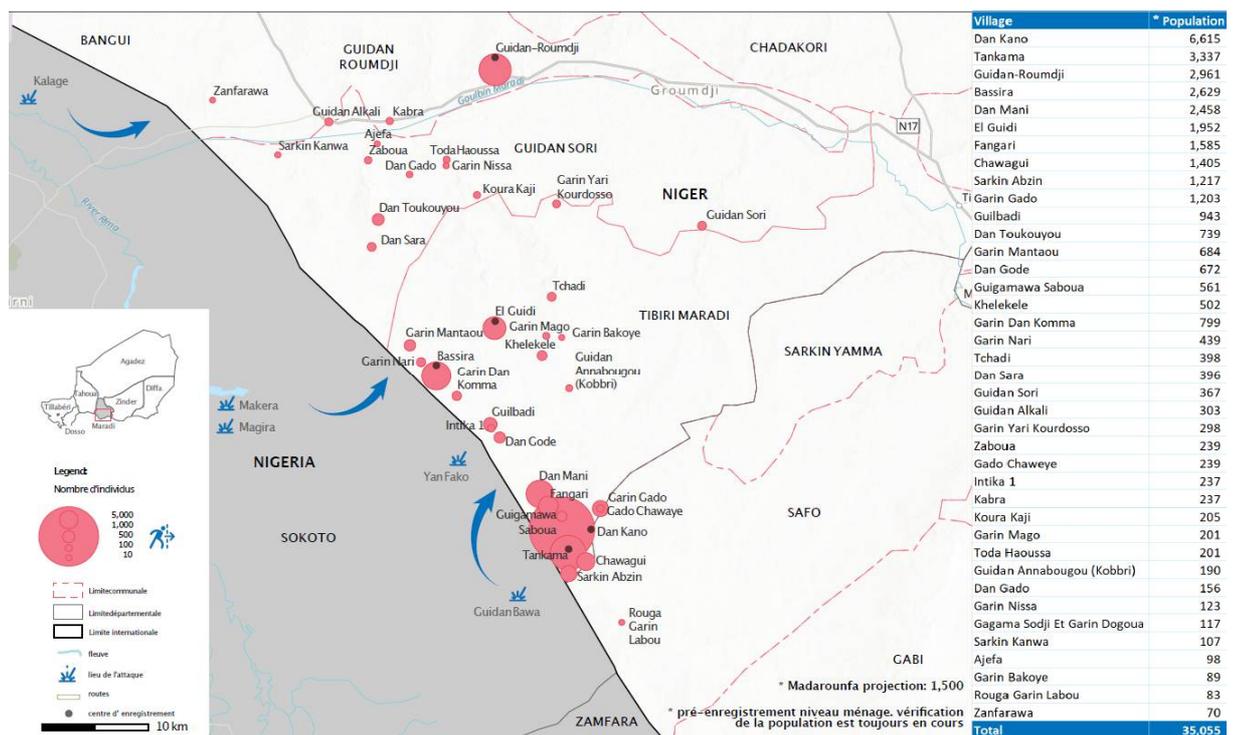
A sudden rise in fierce violence in Nigeria's North-Western Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina States has led to a new emergency situation in Niger's Maradi Region. Thousands of people, mainly women and children, have crossed the border into Niger, fleeing extreme violence. This includes indiscriminate attacks, kidnappings, extortion, murder, sexual violence and destruction of houses and property. They have found refuge in villages nearby the Nigerian border in Niger's Maradi Region. The entry points are the villages of Bassira, Tankama, Chawagui and Dan Kano. The refugee population is scattered in some 40 villages along the border, in the departments of Guidam Roumji, Guidan Sori and Tibiri.

The cause of displacement is not related to the Boko Haram insurgency currently operating in Nigeria's North Eastern states. This latter situation has led to the arrival of 120,000 Nigerian refugees and 18,000 Nigerian returnees to Niger, as well as the internal displacement of 108,000 people in Diffa region. This new situation finds its roots in a dramatic increase in structural tensions between farmers and pastoralists, Haoussa and Fulani, in North Western Nigeria, combined with a rapid increase in criminal acts such as cattle theft and armed banditry. Ongoing military operations are not able to halt the violence of organized groups of bandits. Some Nigerian traditional authorities have also complained about civilian casualties as a result of increased military presence.

Currently, there is no tangible humanitarian presence nor institutional response in Nigeria due to insecurity.

POPULATION STATISTICS

35,055 persons have gone through the initial registration process carried out by UNHCR and the Government. Due to continuous insecurity across the border and considering the porosity of the border, new waves of displacement will likely erupt. Furthermore, potential attacks on the Nigerian side of the border could lead to internal displacement in addition to cross-border displacement.



MAIN MILESTONES

- **Emergency response plan:** The Government, UN agencies and NGO partners, have carried out joint multisector evaluations since May 2019. In June 2019, a response plan has been set up, covering three months of emergency response to the benefit of 20,000 refugees and 7,000 persons from the host community, for a total amount of 6,100,720 USD. UNHCR has mobilized 3,300,000 USD from its operational reserve and is finalizing a comprehensive gap analysis covering the remaining months of 2019.
- **Rapid and laudable intervention of Niger:** The Nigerien authorities have rapidly reacted when confronted to this new situation, maintaining an open door policy and carrying out food distributions. Moreover, the local population has been extremely responsive and continues to welcome refugees in their homes.
- **Strong mobilization of UN agencies and NGOs:** UN agencies and NGOs working in the area have responded quickly to the appeal launched by the Nigerien Government and UNHCR. UNHCR has set up a coordination mechanism with several working groups coordinating actions in Maradi and Niamey. Moreover, UNHCR is coordinating the contributions of the humanitarian community.

OPERATION STRATEGY

The strategy jointly developed by the Government of Niger, UNHCR and its UN and NGO partners has three pillars:

- **A continued emergency response focusing on protection** which includes basic registration (level 1) of all newcomers, profiling, rapid refugee status determination, protection monitoring and psycho-social support;
- **An out of camp and humanitarian-development nexus oriented response:** as displacement may become protracted, especially in the context of continued insecurity in North-West Nigeria, a more sustainable form of assistance will be given. The response is aligned to the Government's strategy to avoid the creation of camps and to host refugees in villages. However, most refugees are settled in villages close to the border which are prone to incursions from armed groups. Therefore, UNHCR has requested the Government's support to relocate refugees to three jointly identified villages where opportunities are present. Investments to increase capacity and infrastructure will be required to absorb the displaced population. The significant presence of development actors prior to the crisis enhances the possibility of operationalizing the nexus. UNHCR is in touch with the World Bank and the African Development Bank to unlock additional resources beyond emergency assistance.
- **Parallel and coordinated emergency assistance** to respond to the most urgent needs. Key priorities are food security and nutrition, access to drinking water and latrines, health services and shelter. Likewise, the needs of the host population will be included as they will receive support for housing, domestic energy, core relief items, etc.

To this end, UNHCR, who has limited operational capacity in the Maradi region, has started deploying staff from other regions, pending the opening of an office and recruitment of staff.

MAIN CHALLENGES

- **Financial resources to respond to this new situation are extremely limited:** while humanitarian actors are still responding to urgent needs in areas with large population displacements and insecurity (Diffa, Tillaberi and Tahoua), the new situation in Maradi region will put the available resources even more under strain.
- **Information gaps and needs:** while assessments have been carried out, the volatility of the crisis calls for a continuous monitoring of the situation and needs in the area. Little information is available about the humanitarian situation and dynamics on the other side of the border.
- **The lean and rainy season in Niger** could result in further needs over the next weeks. There is a significant risk of flooding and disease outbreak.

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