

LOOKING BEYOND THE EMERGENCY TOWARD DEVELOPMENT

The Diffa region has been hosting Nigerian refugees fleeing terrorist violence in the northern states of Nigeria since 2013. With the first attacks on Niger territory early 2015 the situation has deteriorated dramatically. In May 2015, the authorities decided to evacuate the population of the Niger region of the Lake Chad Islands.

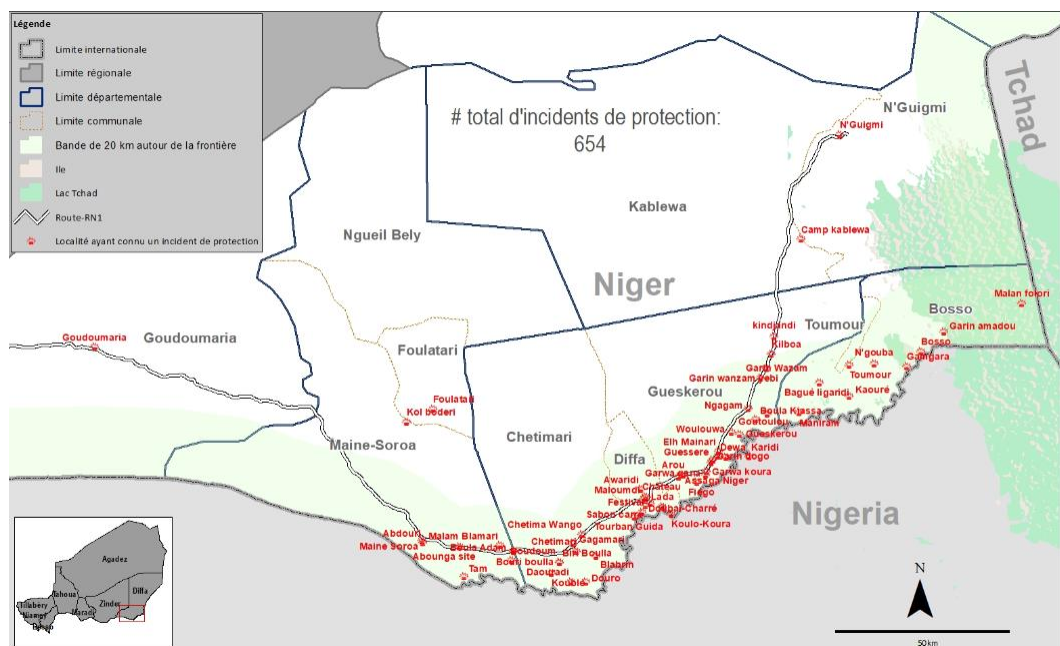
Following the first attacks in the Diffa region, the population on the move has become increasingly mixed: today, we register Nigerian refugees, returnees (Niger nationals who had migrated but returned to Niger), and IDPs. The majority of the displaced are settled in more than 140 spontaneous sites, villages and towns along the one main road in the region, the Route Nationale 1. At the request of the authorities, UNHCR has established two camps: the refugee camp of Sayam Forage and the IDP camp of Kablewa. The latter was closed by the Government in June 2017 after a suicide bomb attack.

The security situation has serious negative effects on the economy of the region, reducing the absorption capacity of the host population and the capacity of the displaced population to support itself. The population of the fertile areas (Lake Chad, Komadougou river) have been displaced, the pastoral routes have been destroyed, and cross-border exchange and trade (seasonal migration, trade of goods) are deeply affected. Despite a significant increase in humanitarian interventions, the needs are still high. Already weak before the crisis, basic services and infrastructure (water, health, and education) are increasingly under pressure and highly dependent on humanitarian actors. Since August 2019 the border with Nigeria has been closed. This increased the price of essential goods for population.

UNHCR has a sub-Office in Diffa town, 5 kilometres from the Nigerian border.

POPULATION STATISTICS

The latest figures released by the government in September 2019 estimate the total displaced population in the region to be **260,353**. This includes 119,541 Nigerian refugees, 29,954 returnees, 109,404 IDPs and 1,454 asylum seekers. The population of Sayam Forage camp has been biometrically registered by the government and UNHCR. At the end of December 2019 the total population of the camp was 18,093. BIMS registration is currently being carried out for the entire out-of-camp displaced population in the region, including refugees, IDPs and returnees in Goudoumaria, Foulatari, N'Guel Beyli et N'Guigmi. As per the end of December 2019, 203,544 displaced people in the region had been biometrically registered, including 117, 340 Nigerian refugees, 56, 184 IDPs, 28,568 returnees and 1,452 asylum seekers.



SECURITY SITUATION

The security situation continues to deteriorate and the State of Emergency, declared in 2015, is still in force. Although there is a timid economic recovery, repeated suicide attacks, assaults, and incursions perpetrated by Boko Haram since March 2019 have resulted in secondary movements of tens of thousands of people within the region. Boko Haram and affiliated armed groups are increasingly turning to kidnappings for ransom in the Diffa region, notably in villages bordering the Komadougou river, the islands or the roads leading to markets. Kidnapping of women and girls occurs more and more. In October 2019 the mayor of Kablewa and his wife were kidnapped and they are still declared missing. We observe additional and secondary displacement due to this heightened risk of kidnapping.

UNHCR and the government of Niger are working on a voluntary relocation plan for up to 10,000 persons, to the camp of Sayam Forage. UNHCR is also supporting the government to seek alternative solutions for the remainder of the newly displaced population.

OPERATION STRATEGY

The key pillars of the UNHCR strategy for the Diffa region are:

- **Ensure institutional resilience** through capacity development and support to the authorities (locally elected and administrative authorities) in the framework of the Niger decentralisation process;
- **Strengthen the out of camp policy** around the urbanisation program through sustainable interventions and dynamic partnerships including with the World Bank;
- **Ensure a coordinated and high quality protection response and maintain an emergency response capacity.**

MAIN MILESTONES

- **Capacity development and support to the government:** UNHCR engages with substantial efforts to strengthen the capacity of the authorities, not only in the management of the crisis but also for recovery//development interventions.
- **Urbanisation program:** 7 communes with a high population density are benefitting from an urbanisation program. It provides a structural response in terms of legal access to land. In 2017, UNHCR, with the support of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), scaled up the intervention. The aim is to provide 6,000 land parcels, and to construct 4,000 “social houses” for the most vulnerable.
- **Introduction of Gas:** Through a win-win partnership with the Niger private sector, UNHCR introduced gas for domestic energy, to replace wood, throughout the Diffa region (220,000 beneficiaries). After Niamey, the region of Diffa is now the second in Niger in terms of gas consumption. Impacts on household economy, environment, and protection are high.
- **Distance Education Centres:** UNHCR established a Distance Education Programme for Nigerian secondary school students in 2015 allowing young refugees to follow the official Nigeria curriculum while they are in Niger and complete their official Nigerian secondary school exams.
- **Protection response:** Protection actors have improved their coordination and the quality of the response, through better involvement of the community and creation of a more effective referral mechanism.

MAIN CHALLENGES

- The hosting areas are generally poorly equipped. Structural but costly infrastructural investments in irrigation, water supply and electricity are required to enable the population to develop income generating activities;
- The Niger public services are highly dependent on humanitarian actors, which creates a risk of a sharp deterioration in living conditions for the population in case of a funding shortfall;
- Risk of irregular access for humanitarian actors due to the security situation and military operation;
- A worsening security situation generates new major displacements and secondary movements; possible movements of Nigerian refugees back towards Nigeria might also occur.

CONTACTS

Mrs. Marlies Cardoen, Associate External Relations Officer, cardoen@unhcr.org, Tel: +227 80 06 81 51
Mrs. Laurence Bron, Associate Reporting Officer, bronl@unhcr.org, Tel: +227 80 09 71 63
Mrs. Ramatou Issa Abdoulaye, Snr. External Relations Assistant, issaabdo@unhcr.org, Tel: +227 98 12 22 12