

Security Context

- Since the beginning of 2017, the security situation has improved. However, during the month of March, several incursions were reported, as well as arrests, military search operations and a strengthened security presence in Diffa town. Compared to the first two months of 2017, March has had more security incidents.
- A double incursion of insurgents in Garin Dogo (20km east of Diffa) and Boudoum (55km south-east of Diffa) resulted in the death of a civilian and the injury of several others. The insurgents also looted a local health centre and set two classrooms at a local school on fire.
- The FDS forces opened fire on an ambulance carrying out a medical evacuation from Sayam Forage refugee camp. Nobody was injured, however the incident highlights the need for more information sharing, and capacity development of FDS forces.
- Several widespread search operations in the region, particularly in Northern Nigeria, have resulted in many arbitrary arrests, on suspicion of association with the insurgent group. These operations also mean that insurgents are extremely mobile at the moment, while hundreds of new arrivals from Nigeria have been reported (see more info below).
- On the 29th of March, in Boulantoungour, an island 7km east of Bosso, a convoy of FDS forces who were carrying out a security mission were ambushed by a group of insurgent combatants. One soldier was reportedly killed, while 11 others were injured. Their two vehicles were stolen and burned.
- The risk of collateral damage from the military side for humanitarians should also be mentioned, in terms of crossfire and the restriction of movements during their operations. On the other hand, it is important to note that so far, no UN staff or other humanitarians have not been targeted by insurgents.

Analysis / Impact

- The decline in the water levels of the Komadougou River, the natural border between Nigeria and Niger must be monitored closely. The shallow water levels enable uncontrolled border crossings and may result in higher numbers of insurgents and higher numbers of displaced entering Niger.
- The commune of Bosso, which has been inaccessible to UNHCR and other UN agencies for several months due to insecurity, is once again accessible, following advocacy efforts by the UN agencies. On the 14th of March the UNHCR protection team, with IRC and DRC carried out a preliminary protection evaluation mission to Bosso in order to analyse the situation.

Highlights

- ECHO Niger and Dakar carried out a monitoring mission to Diffa to on the 13th and 14th of March. They visited several sites to evaluate the shelter and the protection response. ECHO is a key UNHCR partner for the Diffa response.
- From the 22-23rd of March, the COP planning workshop for 2018-2020 was held in Diffa. All partners, including authorities, NGOs, UN agencies, and representatives of refugees and displaced communities, attended. A key objective of the workshop was the alignment of the COP with the objectives of the local sustainable development plans (e.g. PDES).
- From the 28th to 29th of March, a training session was carried out for the Protection Working Group on 'Protection Mainstreaming'. The UNHCR Protection Coordinator delivered the training, while 33 persons participated.
- At the beginning of March, trials of those suspected of association with terrorist groups resumed in Niamey, having been postponed for many months. The Niger Bar Association, having signed a MoU with UNHCR in August of last year, will provide legal aid to several of those in custody whose trials are going ahead.

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Protection

Protection Monitoring

- There were approximately 101 reported protection incidents in the Diffa region in March – a marked increase on the numbers recorded in January and February. This is mainly due to the high levels of arrests.
- The main incidents include the following:
 - 3 incursions / targeted attacks leading to increased paranoia amongst the population;
 - 12 deaths – 10 persons killed by the FDS during search operations and 2 persons killed by insurgents;
 - Many persons (approx. 150) reporting illegal racketeering and taxes by FDS at checkpoints for those without documentation, or those with refugee attestations (fines of 1500-2000 Naira);
 - 48 cases of arrests and detentions;
 - 6 cases of unintentional fires;
 - 16 cases of inter-communal tensions and conflicts over access to natural resources (2 deaths, 5 injuries in Diffa, Chetimari and Gueskerou);
 - 16 cases of SGBV (2 rape cases, 10 cases of forced marriage, 2 cases of psychological violence, 1 case of physical aggression);
 - 4 cases of theft and pillage (400 livestock stolen, 1 CSI pillaged).
- Regarding the reported illegal taxing and racketeering at checkpoints, sensitization sessions and capacity development is planned for the first fortnight of April with FDS forces, to ensure their consideration of refugee rights, humanitarian law and protection, while displaced persons are encouraged to always carry identity documentation when moving.
- In addition to denying freedom of movement, this situation also limits resilience and adaptation strategies of displaced and refugees. In line with follow up Point. 1 of the Niger Plan of Action for the Abuja Declaration, particular attention must be paid to restrictions on the freedom of movement in the context of forced displacement.
- Heightened numbers of cases of forced marriage have been reported, coinciding with the 'lean season', and increased vulnerability and lack of means of subsistence for the most vulnerable.
- Equally, incidents of inter-communal conflict have resurfaced with the onset of the lean season, due to the limited natural resources available (water, pasture etc.).

Population Movements

- The latest government figures for Diffa region are **242,541**: 120,956 IDPs, 106,162 refugees and 15,432 returnees.

A: New Arrivals:

- On the 29th and 31st of March, two evaluation missions with UNHCR, CNE (National Eligibility Commission) and the MAH (Ministry of Humanitarian Action) were carried out to Dewa Kargerri and Gouba in the communes of Gueskerou and Toumour, to evaluate the situation of new arrivals from 4 villages in Nigeria. There are approximately 732 new arrivals in the commune of Gueskerou.
- The new arrivals are composed of 65% women, 15% children 15% elderly persons and 5% men. The majority of men were reportedly stopped by the FMN (Nigerian military) or killed during military interventions. Many new arrivals are faced with stigmatization. They are particularly traumatised by the deaths and arrests of their husbands and family members. There are a high proportion of persons with specific needs, including pregnant and breastfeeding women, orphans, and sick people.
- **Actions being taken:**
 - The Government have organised a dialogue with the Mayor, Prefect and community leaders of the new arrivals to discuss solutions for their installation, protection and their acceptance by the local population;
 - The MAH is in discussion with the Governor regarding a transit site for those who do not wish to move to Sayam Forage, to ensure their protection and to avoid refoulement;

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- Search for Common Ground (SFCG) are organising sensitization sessions with key messages on peaceful coexistence to avoid stigmatization and marginalisation.
- Actions being taken are in line with the Niger Plan of Action for the Abuja Declaration in its follow-up Point No. 3, which seeks to implement practical measures to ensure an adequate balance between security and respect for the right to asylum, including respect for the principle of non-refoulement. Additional actions must be taken to encourage approbation and dissemination of the Action Plan.

B: Movements to Sayam Forage and Kabelawa Camps:

- A total of 227 persons who had newly arrived in Toumour in February, and some refugees in Diffa town were voluntarily relocated to Sayam Forage camp. An SOP is being developed for validation by all actors involved in relocation processes.

C: Spontaneous returns of IDPs to villages of origin

- Approximately 230 spontaneous IDP returns were recorded in March, in the communes of Bosso, Toumour, Maine-Soara, and Chetimari. However, principles for returns in safety and dignity are not yet necessarily in place, while many return areas are still highly militarized, while shelters and infrastructure has been destroyed.
- A protection baseline assessment is ongoing in the Diffa region and includes a qualitative analysis of return intentions. The results will aid in informing the preparation of a returns plan, respecting the principles of the voluntary nature of returns, security and dignity. All of these activities are in line with the Abuja Declaration Action Plan priority axis regarding freedom of movements (objective 2).

D: Inter-site movements

- Inter-site movements have intensified following search operations by the Nigerian military and incursions by the insurgents. The majority of people are moving from sites in Gueskerou, Kabelawa, Toumour and Bosso towards urban areas of Diffa and Chetimari.
- These multiple secondary movements bring additional risks including low school attendance rates, separation of children from parents, lack of monitoring of PWSN and the installation of persons in insecure areas.

E: Pendular Movements to Nigeria:

- During the past 4 months, much pendular cross border movement between Niger and Damasak in Nigeria has been reported. New focal points for border monitoring were appointed at the beginning of March, who reported over 4,500 registered as departing for Damasak, with around 3,200 returning between 1 and 7 days later.
- The returns are reportedly not definitive but rather people going in search of assistance or work opportunities in reconstruction in Damasak, to increase the revenue of their families based in Niger. Others are returning to check on their property. Commercial activities in Nigeria increase movements, while economic activity has stagnated in Diffa.
- The refugee population originating from Damasak number approximately 16,272 people – thus 15% of the total refugee population. 90% of these refugees are living in either Gagamari, Chetimari of Sayam Forage camp.

Recommendations and Unmet Needs – Population movements:

- Maintain weekly consultations with refugees originating from Damasak, based at Gagamari, Chetimari and Sayam Forage;
- Carry out a cross border mission from Diffa to Damasak, Nigeria, in April.

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SGBV : Prevention and Response

- During the month of March, 11 women's spaces were established and opened in various sites throughout the region of Diffa. These spaces serve as a safe space for women to discuss protection and other issues.
- Consultations began with IRC for the establishment of a complaints mechanism regarding sexual abuse and exploitation.
- In both camps of Sayam Forage and Kabelawa, hygiene kits were distributed to all women and teenage girls.
- 5 'tea-debates' were organised in Diffa, Kabelawa, and Kindjandi regarding the following themes: education of children, and the consequences of child marriage.
- 16 cases of SGBV, including 2 rape cases, 10 cases of force marriage, 2 cases of psychological violence, 1 case of physical aggression were reported and responded to in March. All survivors received psychological support, the rape survivors received medical support, while the cases of forced marriage were referred to the Regional Directorate for Child Protection, for monitoring and follow up.
- Efforts to improve coordination of SGBV prevention and response are ongoing, for example through capacity development of relevant actors on case management by UNHCR and UNFPA and the establishment of focal points.

Recommendations and Unmet Needs – SGBV:

- Finalization of the establishment of a complaints mechanism for sexual abuse and exploitation in partnership with IRC.

Child Protection

- Despite efforts by the state and humanitarian actors – in particular the Child Protection Working Group, due to food insecurity many children are not attending school at the various spontaneous sites.
- High levels of child marriage are reported, also leading to school drop-out, and in itself a serious concern in terms of SGBV.
- Protection actors are working to strengthen the child protection system, through capacity development and additional identification and training of host families.
- In March, 2 orphan children were identified at Garin Dogo and referred to the DRPE for assistance. Monitoring of UASC is being carried out by the DRPE, ICRC, UNICEF and other actors.

Recommendations and Unmet Needs – Child Protection:

- Strengthen sensitization of parents and also of state actors present at control points, on the rights of children, in particular in relation to exploitation, work, and children associated with armed groups.

Community Based Protection

- Community based protection committees are being continuously changed and improved to enable the integration of new arrivals and to include them in community based activities.
- In Sayam Forage camp, the refugees noted a lack of means of subsistence and autonomy as a primary issue. Thus a community based women's project for the production of soap has been established in the camp. To date, 600 blocks of soap have been produced. All will be bought by CARE and will be used for the next household / hygiene distributions. Increasing autonomy and self-reliance is an essential protection tool.

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Registration and Documentation

- At the end of March, the population of Sayam Forage had reached 8,835 persons. Throughout the month of March, 540 new arrivals were registered, including 229 who were voluntarily relocated and 311 spontaneous arrivals.
- A physical verification exercise of the population of the camp was carried out by UNHCR with the DREC and CNE, where approximately 3,000 false identities were reported. At the end of March, the population of the camp had reached 16,653 persons (7,805 men and 8,848 women). The population of the camp includes; 15,849 IDPs, 477 refugees, 204 returnees and 123 persons of other nationalities.
- A BIMS – Biometric Management System verification exercise will begin in April to register all refugees identified by the DREC.
- The second meeting of the Reception and Registration Working Group (GTAE) was held in March.

Recommendations and Unmet Needs – Registration and Documentation:

- Carry out a physical verification and profiling of the population of Sayam Forage camp to understand the dynamics of the growing numbers of spontaneous arrivals;
- Following the results of the physical verification at Kabelawa, sensitization must be carried out with the local population regarding false status claims;
- Advocacy for the expansion of the law governing refugee status of Nigerian refugees, to refugees of other nationalities;
- Establishment of a regular information exchange mechanism with registration and documentation actors in Nigeria.

Protection Coordination

- On the 28th and 29th of March, UNHCR under the leadership of the Protection Working Group (PWG), held a training workshop on protection mainstreaming throughout other sectors of intervention. A total of 33 people participated, including humanitarian and government actors.
- Guidelines for the protection of displaced persons during interactions with media and journalists were developed and validated by the PWG in March. This will be shared in April with the HCT.
- Following 35 reported fires in the Diffa region from January – March, Protection Committees confirmed the need for more prevention and sensitization activities. A group was formed, including the MAH, the Regional Directorate of Child Protection, the fire brigades, SFCG, Save, Oxfam and UNHCR, to prepare key messages.
- As regards to returns of IDPs, the government ensures the leadership, with support from humanitarians where necessary. Security is essential before return can be supported. REACH will support the preparation of a map of returns of IDPs, while an intentions survey was discussed by the PWG. A survey on a framework for returns was suggested for presentation to the CCIO.
- In February a survey was launched to evaluate the needs in terms of support and training of coordinators and members of the PWG in Diffa. Key areas for training were identified, including: analytical tools, definitions and protection approaches, advocacy, coordination of sub-groups, strategy development, amongst others.
- A broad cross cutting protection baseline assessment has been launched in the region. Those targeted for the survey include IDPS and refugees, disaggregated by gender, age, and including persons with specific needs. The areas and specific groups have been divided amongst various members of the PWG. A total of 568 questionnaires will be administered, including refugee and IDP key informants. Focus Group discussions will also be carried out in parallel. Sites were selected by the PWG.

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Education

- In the camps, the level of school attendance has significantly improved, following successful advocacy for the provision of adequate numbers of teachers for the camps. However some new arrivals are yet to enrol.
- Outside of the camps, access to education remains a major challenge, in particular in the past month, with increased inter-site and pendular population movements, as well as absence of many teachers who fear for their safety following Nigerian military search operations.
- In the Distance Education Programme, a total of 72 candidates have inscribed for the BECE/BEPC Junior Cycle end of year exams, while 91 candidates have inscribed for the SSCE/BAC Senior Cycle end of year exams. The students will travel to Kano, Nigeria at the beginning of April to sit their exams. An official examination centre will be opened in Diffa region in the coming months.
- Following high demand for a Distance Education Centre in Sayam Forage, COOPI – UNHCR’s partner, will begin construction in the coming months.

Recommendations and Unmet Needs – Education:

- Purchase additional materials for practical exercises, and construct fencing to secure 3 Distance Education Centres;
- Establish a mechanism to ensure access to healthcare for refugee students at Distance Ed. Centres.

Shelter & NFI

- In the camp of Sayam Forage, 39 emergency shelter kits were distributed in March (in addition to 200 in February) to respond to the needs of new arrivals. A gap of 66 households remains, who will receive their shelters in April.
- In Kabelawa, a distribution of 250 shelters that began in February, was completed in March for new arrivals. 45 households are still awaiting shelter and NFI, and will receive them in April.
- The creation of transitional shelters in the UNHCR partner COOPI’s workshop with refugees is ongoing. To date in 2017, 190 shelters have been created. Protective tarp sheeting for the exterior will be delivered soon. The transitional shelters will then be constructed for the newly arrived families in Sayam Forage camp.

Health

- 921 cases of meningitis have been registered since the beginning of the year in 6 regions of Niger, excluding Diffa. 55 persons have died of the disease this year. Efforts must be made to ensure it does not spread to Diffa.
- The numbers of persons availing of medical consultation in both camps increased significantly from February to March. In Sayam in February, 1,448 people attended consultations, while in March this number had risen to 2,184. Similarly in Kablewa, 763 had consultations in February compared to 1,543 in March.
- In March, between the two camps, 347 children received vaccinations, including PEV, penta and measles vaccination.
- The number of women who presented for prenatal consultations in both camps increased significantly from 165 in February, to 352 in March (145 in Sayam and 207 in Kablewa).

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Recommendations and Unmet Needs – Health:

- Strengthen sensitization sessions regarding assisted births and possible consequences of giving birth at home;
- Carry out an exhaustive HIV screening at Kablewa for all of the population, in collaboration with the regional health services;
- Strengthen communication with FDS regarding identification and movements of ambulances, particularly at night.



Access to Energy

- 223 newly arrived families at Sayam forage received gas bottles and kits in March.
- Regarding the out-of-camp intervention, 5,000 new households have been selected and targeted, while the list has been validated. The distribution should begin in April. The targeting process prioritized protection and vulnerability criteria.

Camp Coordination and Camp Management

- The Minister of Humanitarian Action, responsible for camp management of the spontaneous sites, has benefitted from a budget increase for the Site Management pilot project, supported by UNHCR. Three sites were initially targeted for the pilot intervention, while 10 more sites will now be added to the project. An evaluation of the initial pilot intervention is currently underway. The results should be available in April. Criteria for the identification of the 10 additional sites is underway.
- A plan of action will be developed, in line with the community based strategy of UNHCR.