

Refugees and asylum seekers in Agadez

March 2020

Background

Niger is situated in a **geopolitically sensitive area linking the Sahara Desert with the Sahel, and West with Central Africa**. The country has become a major hub for mixed movements northwards to Libya, Algeria and the Mediterranean. At the same time, we have witnessed an increasing number of people leaving Libya or being deported from Algeria on Nigerien territory. In response to the complex humanitarian and security situation in Libya, Niger is increasingly turning into an **alternative space for protection**, including for the asylum-seekers and refugees who failed to reach Europe. UNHCR works with the Government in order to **find solutions** that enable refugees to live their lives in dignity and peace. They can include voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration.

Owing to the role of Niger as a transit country, the UNHCR Niger operation has opened a new office in Agadez in 2017. UNHCR has scaled up its operational capacity to give a response to those in need of international protection within mixed migratory flows.

Role

UNHCR's main objective is to ensure that people in need of international protection have access to asylum. Therefore, UNHCR invests in the structural strengthening of the Nigerien asylum system. Moreover, UNHCR gives

assistance to people under its mandate and aims to find durable solutions, such as resettlement, local integration or a voluntary return to the country of origin if the security conditions allow. Complementary legal pathways, such as family reunification, study visa or humanitarian evacuations are also examined.

In Agadez, UNHCR has continuously invested in strengthening the national Refugee Status Determination (RSD) system through financial and human support, so to enhance its technical capacity to conduct RSD effectively and efficiently.

UNHCR is working closely with the regional authorities to strengthen the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, who have continued to increase in number since the end of 2017. **As of 28 February 2020, 1,076 people, mainly Sudanese nationals, have been identified as in need of international protection**, and registered by UNHCR in Agadez. Of these people, over 13% has been previously biometrically registered by UNHCR in another country or disposes of refugee cards issued in other countries, mainly Chad.

3% are unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs), some have reportedly been the victim of exploitation, torture and human trafficking, after escaping war in Sudan (22% have specific needs). The most vulnerable are hosted in guest houses in Agadez by UNHCR, and have received immediate protection and assistance, while the majority are hosted in a Humanitarian Centre in the outskirts of Agadez, which is managed by UNHCR and partners. Here, those seeking asylum are provided with protection and assistance. With the dire human rights situation in Libya, it is possible that the number of persons of concern reaching Agadez may continue to increase.

Legal framework in Niger

- The asylum system is substantially strengthened, with a focus on timely registration and refugee status determination (RSD) in liaison with the competent authorities;
- People of Concern in mixed movements are aware of protection services available in Niger and can access them;

- Effective protection is available for identified persons of concern who are part of mixed movements.

Achievements so far

- UNHCR, IOM and the Government of Niger have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the identification and referral of persons of concern of information and assistance;
- UNHCR has established a proactive cooperation with the regional authorities in Agadez and has managed to increase the presence of the competent authorities, notably the General Directorate of Civil Status, Refugees and Migration (DGEC-RM) / Ministry of Interior) responsible for refugee status determination;
- UNHCR has established a wide partnership network to identify refugees/asylum seekers in mixed movements;
- UNHCR has constructed a 'Humanitarian Centre' built several kilometres outside of Agadez. This facility is equipped with over 330 refugee housing units, community kitchens and offices for staff working on the site. It has a reception capacity of over 1,300 persons;
- 3 guesthouses remain available in the city of Agadez for the most vulnerable cases;
- UNHCR is engaged in cross-border exchange with Chad and Sudan to develop a comprehensive framework for readmission and voluntary repatriation;

Planned response

- Continue identification of persons of concern among mixed migratory movements, including through a range of referral instruments;
- Promote community-based protection, in order to identify persons with specific needs (unaccompanied minors, victims of sexual or gender-based violence, pregnant women, etc);
- Support the Government of Niger in conducting timely registration of asylum seekers, followed by refugee status determination and issuance of individual documentation;
- Accommodate and care for most vulnerable asylum-seekers;
- Strengthen peaceful coexistence between the host population and the refugees/asylum seekers in Agadez;
- Promote access to solutions (asylum, readmission, repatriation, regularization of stay) for the different groups identified in the mixed movements.
- Develop an education/training support strategy for refugee and asylum seeker children in collaboration with UNICEF.

Challenges

- UNHCR remain in constant dialogue with the authorities to strengthen the peaceful coexistence of the asylum seekers and the host community;
- People continue to be expelled from Algeria to Niger. This increases pressure on the region and can have a negative effect on social cohesion. UNHCR helps those amongst the expelled who are in need of international protection;

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