

Beyond Chibok

Over 1.3 million children uprooted by Boko Haram violence

On 14 April 2014, over 270 schoolgirls were abducted in the town of Chibok, North-East Nigeria. The world was shocked. A global movement started demanding their return. #BringBackOurGirls

Since then, at least 1.3 million children have been uprooted by Boko Haram violence across four countries in the Lake Chad region. The world barely noticed. #BringBackOurChildhood

UNICEF Chad/2015/Laurent Duveiller

Since the Chibok girls' abduction two years ago, thousands of other children have disappeared in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

Scores have been separated from their families and subjected to exploitation, abuse and recruitment by armed groups. Some have even been used to carry out suicide bombings. Yet, their stories are barely told.

The Boko Haram insurgency has triggered the displacement of 2.3 million people since May 2013. In just one year, the number of displaced children increased by over 60 per cent, from 800,000 to 1.3 million children. This is one of the fastest growing displacement crises in Africa.

This complex emergency is first and foremost a crisis of children's care and protection. In North-East Nigeria and increasingly in neighbouring

countries, children are killed, maimed, abducted and recruited to armed groups. They are exposed to sexual violence, schools are attacked and humanitarian access is limited.

Hit-and-run attacks and suicide bombings are depriving people of essential services, destroying vital infrastructure and sowing fear. In North-East Nigeria, about 90 per cent of displaced families are sheltered by some of the world's poorest communities, placing additional strain on already limited resources.

Boys are forced to attack their own families to demonstrate their loyalty to Boko Haram, while girls are exposed to severe abuse including sexual violence and forced marriage to fighters. Some are also used to carry or detonate bombs.

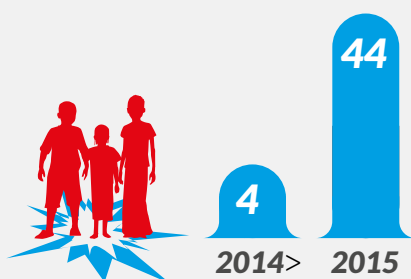
Children increasingly used in suicide attacks in Nigeria and Cameroon

Over the past year, the estimated number of bomb attacks in North-East Nigeria and neighbouring countries has increased sharply.

The proportion of attacks involving boys and girls is also on the rise, with children as young as eight. The use of children, especially girls, as suicide bombers has become one of the defining, and alarming features of the conflict.

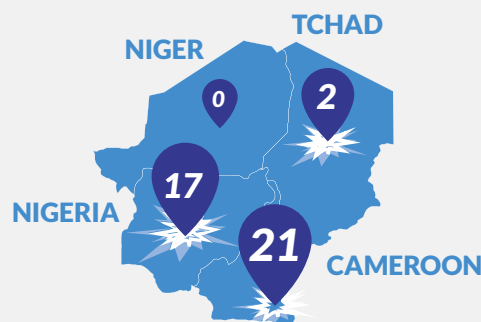
The number of children used in suicide attacks is on the rise - 11 times higher in one year

Estimated number of children used in suicide attacks in four countries



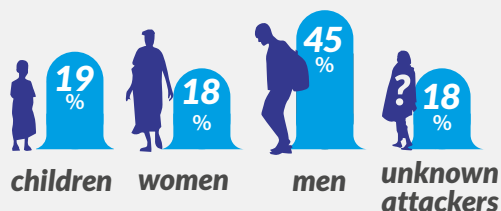
Cameroon has the highest number of suicide attacks involving children

Estimated number of suicide attacks involving children per country (Jan 2014– Feb 2016)



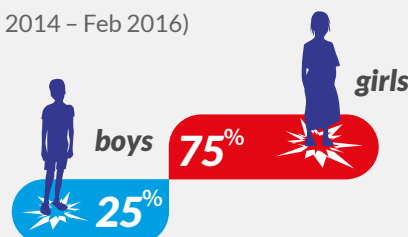
Nearly 1 out of every 5 suicide bombers is a child

Profile of suicide bombers (Jan 2014 – Feb 2016)

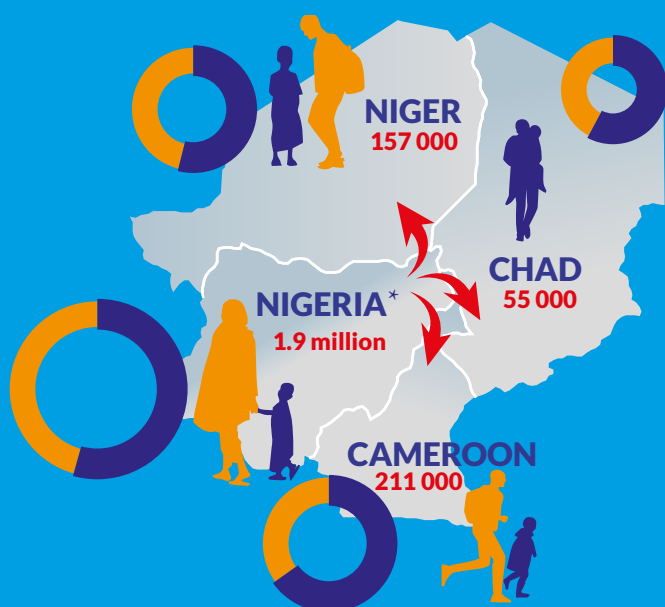


Three quarters of all child suicide bombers are girls

Ratio of girls and boys among child suicide bombers (Jan 2014 – Feb 2016)



One of the fastest growing humanitarian crises in Africa



- Children < 18
- Adults

*In Nigeria, the 4 states: Borno, Yobe, Adamawa and Gombe

Sources: Cameroon – IOM February 2016, UNHCR February 2016; Chad – IOM April 2016, UNHCR February 2016; Niger – DREC November 2015; Nigeria – IOM February 2016. Figures for Nigeria reflect only 4 states: Borno, Adamawa, Yobe and Gombe.

Chad

“We are all survivors here”

“My village was attacked at dawn. I was already eight months pregnant but I had no choice, I had to run as fast as I could. We left everything we had behind.

I had to have a C-section and I was very afraid of losing my babies. Today, they are both fine and healthy. I feel blessed as I see them growing every day. We are all survivors here.

Most importantly, we are no longer afraid of being attacked in the middle of the night. My children sleep well and they can go to school without being frightened by the sound of gunshots. It's the first time they're going to school, I told them that they are lucky because they will have a better life. They did not have that chance back in Nigeria.

Binta Mahamadou is a mother of 6. She lives in Dar Es Salam refugee camp, in the Lake Region of Chad, with her twin babies who were born just a few weeks after she arrived.

How many children received assistance in the Lake Chad region in 2015?

UNICEF key achievements in North-East Nigeria and neighbouring countries



145,452

Children who receive psychosocial support in child protection programmes



236,533

People with access to safe water



350,669

Children vaccinated against measles



152,322

Children who participated in schools / Learning programmes

Cameroon

Far from home

“I miss my father and mother a lot. I do not know if they are alive or dead. I have not seen them since the war began.”

In a UNICEF supported psychosocial therapy session, Atta Hinna made this drawing to represent what was missing in his life as a refugee in Maroua, Cameroon, after fleeing the violence in North-East Nigeria.



Abducted by Boko Haram, rejected by families

As the military are progressively retaking areas under control by Boko Haram, many women and girls are being freed after months in captivity. But even after their release, their nightmare is not over.

Girls and women kidnapped by Boko Haram often face mistrust, discrimination and persecution upon their return to their communities, according to a new research paper by UNICEF and non-governmental organization International Alert.

The research paper, [“Bad Blood”](#), suggests that many women who return to their families are viewed with deep suspicion either because they are carrying the children of Boko Haram fighters or because of the fear they may turn against their own communities.

Such distrust is creating an atmosphere of terror and suspicion in many communities across the region. Children born as a result of sexual violence risk being rejected and even killed for fear that they could turn against their families and communities when they grow up.

UNICEF is working with communities and families in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger to fight stigma against survivors of sexual violence and to build a protective environment for former abductees. In 2015, UNICEF provided over 145,000 children affected by the conflict with counselling and psychosocial support to help them cope with emotional distress.

Nigeria

“If you don’t marry us, we will kill you”

“If you don’t marry us, we will kill you,” they said. ‘I will not marry you, even if you kill me,’ I responded. Then they came for me at night. They kept me locked in a house for over a month and told me ‘whether you like it or not, we have already married you.’

When I arrived at the camp, I didn’t have anything. I had to borrow from people. Some women would beat me, they would chase me away. They said, ‘you are a Boko Haram wife, don’t come near us!’ If I used their washing basin to clean, they would say ‘You are Boko Haram wife, don’t touch our basin’. Everywhere I went, they would abuse me and call me a Boko Haram wife. I felt as if I was neglected, I did not have anybody to help or support me.

Sometimes the women abuse me, sometimes they don’t. When I feel sadness in my heart, sometimes I cry and wipe my tears away.

Khadija, 17, grew up in Garwa, Cameroon. While she was visiting her mother in Banki, Nigeria, last year, Boko Haram fighters kidnapped her, locked her up in a house and told her she had been married to a Boko Haram fighter. She fell pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy while in captivity. During a Nigerian military attack on Boko Haram, she escaped with her baby and hid in the forest. Nigerian soldiers eventually found her and flew her to the Dalori displacement camp in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

Khadija had to spend a few months in hospital. When she left the hospital and moved to a tent in the camp, other women refused to share the water pump and other washing facilities with her, accusing her of being a Boko Haram wife. They called her names.

Khadija says she struggles to find enough food for her baby and does not know what the future holds for her.

Over 670,000 children still deprived of education

The conflict has had a huge impact on the already fragile education systems of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

Over 1,800 schools have been closed, damaged, looted, set on fire or used to shelter displaced persons, mostly in North-East Nigeria and Cameroon.

Many teachers fear to return to the classroom and parents are scared to send their children back to school. Insecurity and attacks have kept more than 670,000 children out of the classrooms for more than a year, putting them at risk of dropping out of school altogether.

Last year, over 250,000 children were able to

return to schools in conflict-affected areas in North-East Nigeria. More than 132,000 children received learning materials, including in local schools hosting displaced students.



© UNICEF Nigeria/ 2015/ Andrey Asiebo

Chad

“ I never had the chance to go to school”

I never had the chance to go to school, I am very happy to learn new things every day. I love mathematics,
says Aisha Mahamat.

Now, I have the opportunity to study. My son, Aboukar, stays with my mother when I am in class.

This 15-year-old Nigerian refugee in Chad was married two years ago. She is now divorced and mother of a child. She lives with her mother and son in Dar es Salam refugee camp, in the Lake region of Chad. For the first time in her life she is realizing her dream: to go to school.

”

Chronic nutrition crisis exacerbated by violence

The Boko Haram conflict is exacerbating an already critical food and nutrition crisis that has been brewing for over a decade. In the Lake Chad region, severe acute malnutrition is high among children.

Insecurity, displacement, unfavourable weather conditions and epidemics have also impacted the nutrition status of children over the past two years. In Boko Haram-affected areas across Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, the estimated number of children with severe acute malnutrition increased from 149,000 to 195,000 between January 2014 and January 2016.

Across the Lake Chad region, farming, fishing and cross-border trade have been severely disrupted. Both buyers and sellers are scared of suicide bombers targeting markets. Many herdsman and farmers have lost their livelihoods. Families can no longer afford adequate food, even when it is available in the market. Challenging access to clean water, sanitation and basic health



services further worsens the nutritional status of children and women.

Last year, over 93,000 children with severe acute malnutrition received medical treatment and therapeutic food. UNICEF trained health workers and community volunteers, many of whom are among the displaced, to provide an integrated package of services to manage and prevent acute malnutrition. UNICEF also helped expand nutrition programmes in the conflict-affected areas.



A second family

Tina, 11, was separated from her family when she fled an attack on her village in Nigeria. The 11-year-old found safety and support in a refugee camp in Cameroon, and holds onto the hope of finding her brothers and sisters.

“ I am happy that while I am away from my own parents I am protected by another family. I have three brothers and two sisters – and I hope to find them soon, Tina says. ”

Tina received clothing, psychosocial support and personal hygiene products and was taken in by a foster family, while efforts are being made to find her own family. Today, Tina attends child-friendly spaces supported by UNICEF. She is learning how to sew, garden and cook and hopes to show off her new skills to her parents one day.

More than 140 unaccompanied children have been registered in the camp. Along with other United Nations agencies and the Government of Cameroon, UNICEF is helping these children with psychosocial support and temporary placement in foster families.

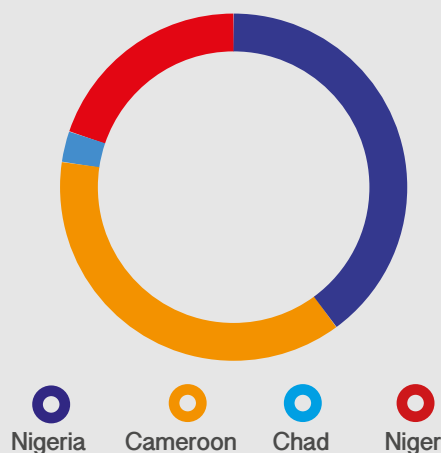
On the ground in four countries

UNICEF and its partners in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger have increased the level of assistance to thousands of families in the region, with access to safe water, education, counselling and psychosocial support, as well as vaccines and treatment for malnutrition.

UNICEF operations have been scaled up with teams on the ground in Maiduguri (Borno State, Nigeria), Yobe (Adamawa State, Nigeria), Diffa (Niger), Maroua (Cameroon), and in Bagasola (Chad). However, a shortage of funding and difficult access due to insecurity have hindered the delivery of humanitarian assistance to thousands of children in need.

Coping with distress after violence

Over 145,000 conflict-affected children received psychosocial support in four affected countries in 2015



Niger

Vaccinated upon arrival

“Vaccination is very important. Measles scares me. I have already lost three children to it, says Haoua who first fled to Niger two years ago.”

Immediately upon her arrival to the refugee site the mother of six rushed to get her children vaccinated against measles.

When Haoua arrived, medical teams were already on site conducting a vaccination campaign against measles, a devastating disease for young children.

UNICEF and its partners are on the ground serving the population of Diffa near the border with Nigeria to make sure they have access to health and protection services.



Number of children UNICEF aims to reach in 2016



225,000

Children who will receive psychosocial support in child protection programmes



175,000

Children under 5 with severe acute malnutrition who will be admitted for treatment



114,000

Children to be vaccinated against measles



927,000

People with access to safe water



588,000

People with improved sanitation



220,000

Children who will receive learning materials



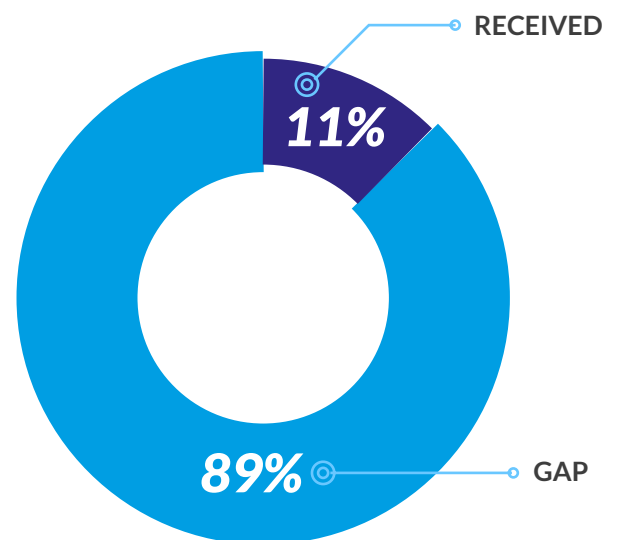
240,000

Children participating in schools / Learning programmes

Urgent funding needs

For 2016, UNICEF will continue to increase support for the children affected by the conflict.

Last year, UNICEF only received 44 per cent of its funding requirement for the humanitarian response across the four countries. This year, UNICEF needs **US\$ 97 million** to provide life-saving assistance to families affected by Boko Haram violence across Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Only US\$ 11 million have been received so far.



*The numbers above reflect the children UNICEF plans to reach with existing partners and resources available.

What is UNICEF asking for?

- As children affected by the conflict need psychological and medical care, **more services need to be made available** and accessible to help them recover from the atrocities they have suffered or witnessed.
- **Violence against children and women in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger must stop.** Discrimination against girls and women released from captivity must end. Survivors of violence should receive special attention to facilitate their reintegration into their communities.
- **Children associated with armed groups need to be released and reintegrated into their communities as soon as possible.** These children are victims and need support to return to the community.
- **Displaced persons who would like to return to their homes should be allowed to do so voluntarily and in full respect of their rights and dignity.** Children and families should not be encouraged to go back to their communities if conditions are not safe.
- Without the commitment of national governments and the international community, thousands of children risk not being reached. **UNICEF is calling for increased funding from donors to support conflict-affected women and children in Nigeria and neighbouring countries.**

#BringBackOurChildhood

