

Niger is hosting Malian refugees since the outbreak of the crisis in Northern Mali in 2012 in 3 refugee camps in Tillabery region, in a refugee hosting area for nomadic refugees in Tahoua region, and in urban areas such as Niamey and Ayorou. A second refugee hosting area Tazalite, was closed by the Government in December 2016, following an attack against the security forces. UNHCR facilitated the relocation of the population.

Malian refugees are recognized on a *prima facie* basis and enjoy a favorable protection environment with the right to settle where they wish and to access basic social services and the formal and informal job market.

UNHCR has 1 Sub-Office (Tillabery) and 3 Field Offices (in Ouallam, Abala and Tahoua) assisting Malian refugees.



Population Statistics

As of 31st December 2016, 60,154 Malian nationals were registered as refugees in Niger. This is significantly higher than the numbers of refugees recorded at the peak of the crisis in 2012. Despite the signature of a peace agreement in 2015, recurrent confrontations between armed groups and government forces and between various ethnic groups in Northern Mali cause a constant influx of refugees into the Tillabery and Tahoua regions, with 5,449 new arrivals between January and end of July. In 2016, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary return of just 2,445 refugees. A tripartite agreement between UNHCR and the Governments of Niger and Mali, signed in 2014 provides a legal framework for voluntary returns in respect of the related international standards. However, the parties consider that the conditions in parts is currently not promoted. Persons that wish nevertheless to return to Mali are counseled on the prevailing situation and sign a Voluntary Repatriation Form. They receive one-time cash assistance to pay for their transport.

UNHCR ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION

In the context of prolonged displacement, the assistance and protection strategy for Malian refugees focusses on medium and long term solutions that will promote refugees' autonomy and their integration into national service systems. To this end, UNHCR supports and builds capacity within the Government of Niger and other local actors. Several milestones can be highlighted:

- The refugee hosting zones established in Tahoua region as an alternative to camps allow refugees to maintain their nomadic lifestyle. Socio-economic studies show a higher living conditions and increased levels of resilience than in camp-settings.
- Establishment of 'Guichet Unique' in Niamey, to provide assistance and protection to all urban refugees and asylum seekers in one place. This is a joint project with the government and several NGO partners.
- The urbanization project piloted in Ayorou has provided 400 refugee households of Tabareybarey camp with the opportunity to settle permanently in a home in the town of Ayorou, while an additional 50 vulnerable households from the local population have been provided with a home as part of the project. This will be scaled up to the other areas hosting refugees in Tillabery region.
- The refugees of Tabareybarey and Mangaize camp are already integrated in the national health care system. After UNHCR facilitated repairs of local infrastructure, Tabareybarey camp was connected to Ayorou's urban water system. UNHCR continue to support national actors to improve access to basic services, particularly health, water, and education, and to integrate refugees.
- Cash for NFIs have increased the dignity of refugees in Mangaize camp. Cash assistance allows refugees to satisfy their household's individual needs, giving them choice and flexibility in selecting items.

Cash for NFIs allows refugees to renew/repair their shelters and NFIs as needed. E-vouchers have also recently been introduced in Mangaize camp to provide refugees choice in terms of food distributions.

- Also in Mangaize, UNHCR piloted a contract approach to support refugees in generating income and to boost livelihood activities. Refugees accept to receive a monthly cash-grant of 10.000 FCFA over 18 months, before a definitive cessation of assistance at the end of the project phase. A 2016 CaLP study showed positive impacts on beneficiaries' economic situation and the local economy.
- Gas projects in Abala, Tahoua and Tabareybarey reduce refugees' fire wood consumption considerably, limiting environmental damage, and increasing purchasing power and school attendance. Women and girls are also at a lower risk of SGBV related incidents associated with fire wood collection.
- In Niamey, one-off food, shelter and NFI assistance is targeted towards the most vulnerable households using a vulnerability scorecard. In the camps and refugee hosting areas, UNHCR and WFP will introduce targeted food and cash assistance to identify those that can sustain themselves and those that cannot. Targeting criteria include socio-economic and protection indicators.
- At the beginning of 2017, a BIMS (Biometric Identity Management System) project was completed in the refugee hosting area of Intikane and the camp of Abala. This is the first time biometrics have been used for registration in Niger.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2017 AND BEYOND

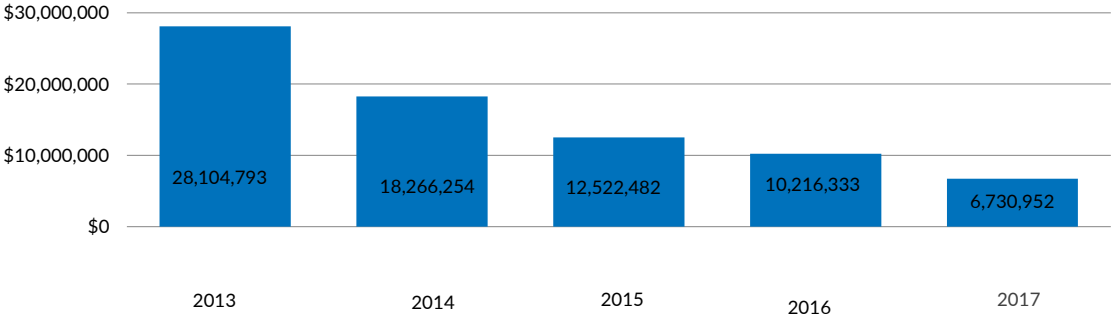
- Closure of the camps by 2019, and transformation into sustainable settlements.
- Targeted assistance to enable self-reliance of refugees.
- Integration of Malian refugee population into the local community, and all national basic service systems at the same level as local population, including health, education and water.
- Continued rehabilitation of key basic community infrastructures through support to the national responsible authorities, to facilitate the integration of the refugees.
- Urbanization initiatives for the areas of Mangaize and Abala, to provide housing to refugees and vulnerable host population.
- Extension of Multipurpose Cash Grants (MCG) to the other camps and refugee hosting areas.
- Expansion of livelihood activities and collaboration with development actors and donors, to promote refugees' autonomy and self-sufficiency.
- Finalization of BIMS biometric registration of all refugees on the Niger territory.
- Advocacy for the inclusion of refugees in all development initiatives in the region.

MAIN CHALLENGES

- Increasing insecurity and instability in areas close to the border.
- State of emergency declared in the regions of Tillabery and Tahoua in March 2017, which may impact refugees in the regions.
- Deteriorating infrastructure in the sites.
- Funding shortfalls as partners shift focus and resources towards the Nigeria situation.
- Decreasing budget for the Malian situation (see graphic)

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Mali situation – Budget Trend 2013 - 2017



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