UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Nigeria

NORTHERN NIGERIA

# Protection Impact During the Lean Season

*September 2025*

## Overview

The lean season in Nigeria runs from around May to October annually. It impacts millions of agrarian families that rely on a single rain-fed crop cycle for their income, and who have exhausted their savings by the start of the planting/rainy season. Many -- largely in northern Nigeria -- are already forcibly displaced due to the attacks by non-state armed groups or bandits.

The lack of income during the lean season leads to hunger and malnutrition and also results in an increase in protection risk such as exploitation of and violence against women, child labour and early marriage, secondary forced displacement, and the loss of assets and legal documentation.

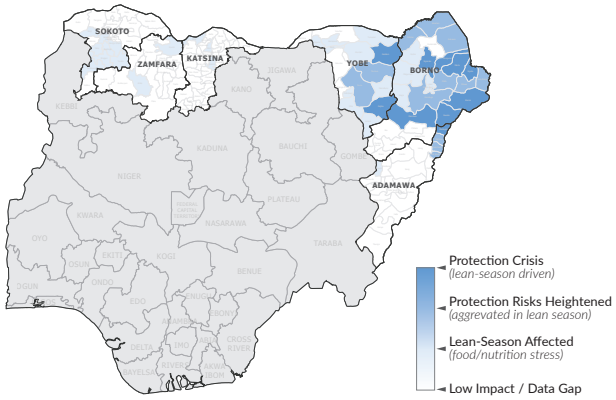
In 2025, the lean season is proving to be the most severe in seven years, with reduced food and nutritional assistance, underfunded protection services, floods and other climate shocks resulting in slow recovery and increased vulnerability, and a deteriorating security situation resulting in further restrictions in humanitarian access. Negative coping mechanisms are on the rise, impacting women and children in particular.

## Most Affected Areas & Protection Risk Intensity

**6 states** *most affected by the lean season*

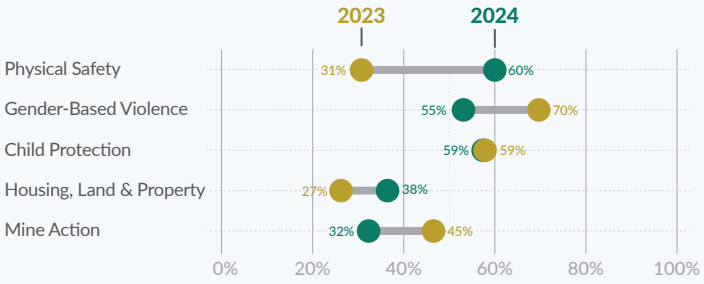
**10 LGAs** *where the lean season drives protection crises*

**1.2m** *forcibly displaced people at heightened protection risk during the lean season*




## Lean Season Trends | 2023 - 2024

**Proportion of protection incidents & cases reported during the lean season**




## Challenges that Turn Risk into Harm

### Conflict & Insecurity

*Ongoing conflict restricts access to farmland and markets to buy and sell their produce, further worsening the effects of the lean season.*

### Economic & Climate Shocks

*A rise in commodity prices over the past year coupled with rains/floods have weakened the capacity of families to cope and recover quickly. Families are at risk of evictions, displacement and are unable to access basic services.*

### Funding Cuts

*Reduced funding is resulting in reduced protection and essential services that have been a lifeline for conflict-affected communities.*

## Protection Impact *(as of Sept 2025)*

### Physical Safety

**36** *abductions in May-Sep 2025*

Families are forced to leave their towns to find income, food, water and firewood, resulting in an increase in abductions and attacks along farm and water routes by non-state armed groups

### Population Movement

**300+** *people move across the border*

For the first time in 2025, Nigerians are moving from Maiha and Mubi LGAs (Adamawa State) to Cameroon due to lack of food. Cameroonian refugees are also returning home due to this reason

### Child Marriage & Child Labor

**25%** *increase in child marriages*

Economic stress and reduced services during the lean/rainy season correlate with rises in child marriage and child labour, as parents are unable to care for their children, or need help to earn money

### Violence Against Women

**25%** *increase in cases reported*

Women are at greater risk of domestic violence during the lean season. Reduced funding is resulting in reduced protection services to help prevent violence. It has also reduced the support to survivors of violence through safe spaces, health care options, psychosocial support and legal advice.

### Housing, Land & Property

**72,000+** *people have lost their civil documentation*

People are forced to travel or move on to find food and livelihoods. Evictions due to nonpayment of rent is on the rise. Losses are exacerbated due to flooding, which is now a regular occurrence in the second half of the lean season.

### Exposure to Explosive Ordinances

**52%** *of civilian casualties occurred in the lean season*

People travel to more distant and unknown locations to farm and forage for food with little knowledge of the risks posed by EODs . Data shows civilian casualties nearly doubled over the past two years.

## UNHCR Nigeria Response

### Emergency Protection Response

*UNHCR is working with national NGOs and community-based organizations to identify persons with specific needs such as single parents, unaccompanied and separated children, women at risk, the elderly and persons with disabilities and provide emergency support and referring them to relevant government services for further assistance.*

### Market-based Solutions

*These include establishing vocational training centers as well as irrigation projects across large agricultural land to increase their income and reduce their dependency on humanitarian assistance.*

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