

LOOKING BEYOND THE EMERGENCY TOWARD DEVELOPMENT

Background & Population Statistics

The Diffa region has been hosting Nigerian refugees fleeing terrorist violence in the northern states of Nigeria since 2013. With the first attacks on Niger territory early 2015 the situation has deteriorated dramatically. In May 2015, the authorities decided to evacuate the population of the Niger region of the Lake Chad Islands.

Following the first attacks in the Diffa region, the population on the move has become increasingly mixed. The majority of the displaced are settled in more than **140 spontaneous sites, villages and towns** along the one main road in the region, the **Route Nationale 1**. At the request of the authorities, UNHCR has established two camps: the refugee camp of Sayam Forage and the IDP camp of Kablewa. The latter was closed by the Government in June 2017 after a suicide bomb attack.

The security situation has serious negative effects on the economy of the region, reducing the absorption capacity of the host population and the capacity of the displaced population to support itself. The population of the fertile areas (Lake Chad, Komadougou river) have been displaced, the pastoral routes have been destroyed, and cross-border exchange and trade (seasonal migration, trade of goods) are deeply affected. Despite a significant increase in humanitarian interventions, the needs are still high. Already weak before the crisis, basic services and infrastructure (water, health, and education) are increasingly under pressure and highly dependent on humanitarian actors. The border with Nigeria has been closed in August 2019 which increase the price of essential goods for population. Since April 2019, movements are restricted on the Gueskerou, Toumour, Bosso axis following the discovery of explosive devices, successive attacks and kidnappings. In 2020, attacks and kidnappings by armed groups continue, as threats towards humanitarian workers.

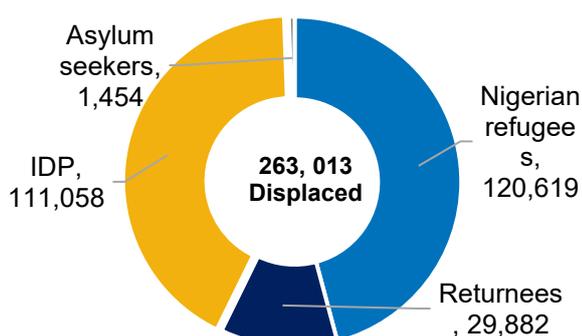
Evolution of protection incidents in Diffa region



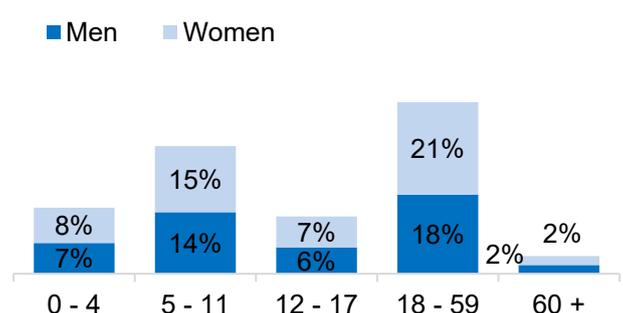
As of March 2020, UNHCR registered biometrically **224,598** displaced people in the region (**66,862 household**), including **125,919 Nigerian refugees**, **65,773 IDPs**, **30,807 returnees** (Niger nationals who had migrated but returned to Niger) and **2,099 asylum seekers**. The population of the Sayam Forage camp is 18,180 individuals. Since February 2020, UNHCR carries out BIMS registration for the unregistered displaced population, including refugees, IDPs and returnees in N'Guigmi commune.

The latest figures published by the government in December 2019 estimating **263,013** displaced persons remain official.

Government figures as of 31st December 2019



Age distribution of displaced population in 2019



Operation Strategy

The key pillars of the UNHCR strategy for the Diffa region are:

- **Ensure institutional resilience** through capacity development and support to the authorities (locally elected and administrative authorities) in the framework of the Niger decentralisation process;
- **Strengthen the out of camp policy** around the urbanisation program through sustainable interventions and dynamic partnerships including with the World Bank;
- Ensure a coordinated and high-quality **protection response** and maintain an **emergency response** capacity.

Main Milestones

- **Capacity development and support to the government:** UNHCR engages with substantial efforts to strengthen the capacity of the authorities, not only in the management of the crisis but also for recovery/development interventions.
- **Urbanisation program:** 7 communes with a high population density are benefitting from an urbanisation program. It provides a structural response in terms of legal access to land. In 2017, UNHCR, with the support of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), scaled up the intervention. The aim is to provide 6,000 land parcels, and to construct 4,000 "social houses" for the most vulnerable. To date, 1,585 sustainable houses for the most vulnerable families have already been built and 2,246 people are employed.
- **Introduction of Gas:** Through a win-win partnership with the Niger private sector, UNHCR introduced gas for domestic energy, to replace wood, throughout the Diffa region (220,000 beneficiaries). After Niamey, the region of Diffa is now the second in Niger in terms of gas consumption. Impacts on household economy, environment, and protection are high.
- **Distance Education Centres:** UNHCR established a Distance Education Programme for Nigerian secondary school students in 2015 allowing young refugees to follow the official Nigeria curriculum while they are in Niger and complete their official Nigerian secondary school exams.
- **Protection response:** Protection actors have improved their coordination and the quality of the response, through better involvement of the community and creation of a more effective referral mechanism. Since January 2020, more than 5,000 Chadian refugees have found safety in Kindjandi where UNHCR provides emergency response.

Main Challenges

- The hosting areas are generally poorly equipped. Structural but costly infrastructural investments in irrigation, water supply and electricity are required to enable the population to develop income generating activities;
- The Niger public services are highly dependent on humanitarian actors, which creates a risk of a sharp deterioration in living conditions for the population in case of a funding shortfall;
- Irregular access for humanitarian actors due to the security situation and military operation;
- A worsening security situation generates new major displacements and secondary movements; possible movements of Nigerian refugees back towards Nigeria might also occur.

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LINKS

Regional portal - UNHCR operation page - Twitter