

Emergency Transit Mechanism

Background

In November 2017, UNHCR established for the first time an Emergency Evacuation Transit Mechanism (ETM) for the evacuation of vulnerable refugees from detention in Libya to Niger. The programme was established in order to facilitate the processing of refugees trapped in detention and to enable access to protection and to durable solutions.

UNHCR and the Government of Niger signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in December 2017, temporarily expanding the Niger asylum space to these refugees. This MoU has been extended in December 2019 for another two-year duration.

Context

Evacuations

Persons of concern to UNHCR in Libya are identified for eventual solutions outside of Libya based on their vulnerabilities. While in the past evacuees were either directly evacuated from detention centres or through the Gathering & Departure Facility (GDF), persons are at the moment selected mostly from urban settings with a history of being in a detention centre before being released. This is due to ensure no negative coping mechanisms are sought as well as to advocate for the 'end of detention policy' in Libya. They are screened and their personal information is shared with UNHCR Niger.

The first evacuation flight took place on the 11th of November 2017. Since then, 26 more evacuation flights have arrived from Libya to Niger, carrying a total of **3,208** refugees and asylum seekers.

Process in Niger

Once the refugees and asylum seekers arrive in Niger, UNHCR conducts a verification interview and register them biometrically. This is followed by refugee status determination (RSD) procedures by the government and UNHCR. Finally, interviews to prepare resettlement files are completed by UNHCR. These files are then submitted to third countries for consideration. For unaccompanied children, a Best Interests Determination (BID) is completed to seek the most appropriate solution. UNHCR and partners provide accommodation, where food, medical care, education, psychosocial support etc. are readily available. On the 4th of March 2019, a first group of 120 evacuees were transferred to the ETM transit facility in the commune of Hamdallaye, in the Tillaberi region (40km from Niamey), constructed with a maximum capacity of 1,500 persons. The most vulnerable refugees remain in guesthouses in the capital city. Durable construction and development of the transit facility is ongoing.

Educational/ vocational training have started in 2019 with partners Intersos, Goodneighbors and Forge Arts targeting men and women but also 45 unaccompanied minors (30 in mechanics, 15 in esthetics). UNHCR partner Intersos will launch a survey to identify other training subjects (waiter, plumber, IT).

Since February 2020, the ETM team pilots the use of cash for food for 28 households who have dietary needs in guesthouses and in Hamdallaye through mobile money. This three months pilot project may be expanded to the larger population after its evaluation.

Resettlement Missions

Following screening of the files in resettlement countries, the responsible parties of the governments of third countries undertake a mission to Niger to interview those under consideration for resettlement. The results of the interviews are communicated to UNHCR Niger following the resettlement mission. Some resettlement countries may decide based solely on the file shared with them by UNHCR, and do not necessarily undertake a resettlement mission to Niger.

Resettlement & other durable solutions

If accepted, the transport of the refugees to the resettlement country is organized by the logistical partner IOM. Amongst other durable solutions which are being examined, are humanitarian and/or study visas, as well as family reunification.

The resettlement of refugees evacuated from Libya to Niger is part of UNHCR's overall resettlement programme. Refugees who were already present in Niger and deemed to require resettlement as a solution, are also included in the programme. Globally, resettlement is one of 3 solutions pursued by UNHCR, the others being voluntary return or local integration.

Resettlement Pledges & Departures

UNHCR has received a total of **6,351** resettlement pledges for the Libya-Niger/Rwanda situation out of which 1,131 confirmed pledges are for ETM Niger evacuees and 450 for refugees registered in Niger. The following countries have provided confirmed pledges for Niger: Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

As of 1 April 2020, **2,454 evacuated** refugees have departed from Niger to resettlement countries.

COVID 19

Due to COVID-19 and the Niamey closure by the government as preventive measure on 29 March, the ETM centre in Hamdallaye became a place of self-isolation with no in/out movements of PoCs and staff for 2 weeks. Services continue to be provided by essential partners (APBE, Intersos and Forge Arts) also confined in the centre.

In 2019, NGO Forge Arts trained and equipped more than 286 women to produce and commercialize liquid soap, bleach and water containers. Since March 2020, an additional number of 25 women has been trained to produce soap and bleach. To prevent the COVID 19 outbreak, they started distributing freely soap and bleach to more than 60 persons living in the mental health center in Niamey and pursue these distributions within the transit center.

Funding

- **EUR 30 million EUTF** funding received since December 2017
Initially it was foreseen that EUR 8 million will be used for setting up an ETM in Burkina Faso, however with the official notification received by the Government of Burkina Faso in March 2019, the EUR 8 million were allocated to the ETM Niger by the EU.
- **EUR 15 million EUTF** top-up has been approved by the EUTF to continue until June 2021, contracting is currently on-going.

For additional information, please see the Libya-Niger situation factsheet available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/asmwa>.

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LINKS

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