

# Far North Cameroon – Chad Emergency

16 December 2021

A resurgence in inter-communal violence in **Cameroon's Far North region** has **forced over 80,000 persons to flee to neighbouring Chad**, while over 15,000 are displaced within the country.

Humanitarian **access to affected populations in Far North Cameroon remains difficult**. Both those internally displaced and the refugees in Chad have an urgent need for core relief items such as blankets, food, healthcare support, shelter and protection.

**UNHCR has declared a Level 2 emergency in Chad**. It is **rapidly scaling its operations** to assist affected populations in **Cameroon** and newly arrived refugees in **Chad**.

## Operational Context

### Population movements and political and security situation in Far North Cameroon

- Clashes between communities of herders, farmers and fishermen broke out on 5 December in the village of Ouloumsa. Violence quickly spread to neighbouring villages before reaching Kousseri, the region's major city ('chef-lieu'), on 8 December. 112 villages were burned, over 100 people were wounded and 44 died.
- As of 13 December 2021, 82,637 persons are reported to have arrived in Chad after fleeing these inter-communal clashes in Far North Cameroon. In addition, at least 15,215 persons are internally displaced within the Far North Cameroon region.



*Refugees who fled Far North Cameroon wait in line for a food distribution in Oudouma, Chad. © UNHCR/Aristophane Ngargoune*

- Previous inter-communal clashes had taken place in August this year. At the time, some 23,000 people had been displaced across Cameroon and Chad. 8,500 refugees had since remained in Chad, but their repatriation into Cameroon was at an advanced stage of discussion between the two countries when the new clashes broke out.
- As of 13 December, the situation is relatively calm again in the affected areas of the Far North. Some villages are empty, while in others shops have re-opened and life resumed its course. However, tensions remain high between the communities involved, and it is not currently possible to predict whether the newfound calm will be durable.

# UNHCR Emergency Response

## Level 2 Emergency Declaration

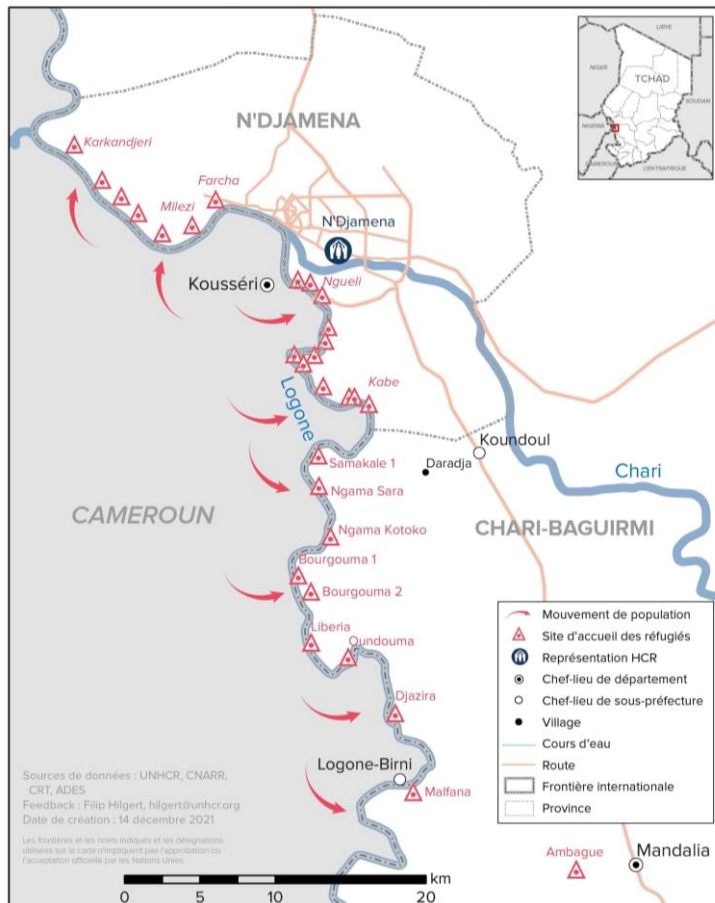
- UNHCR's emergency response started on 9 December. This marked the resumption of operations in the Far North area after they had been suspended for a few days due to the high levels of violence and insecurity.
- On 15 December, a Level 2 emergency (out of four levels) has been declared for the UNHCR Operation in Chad. The Level 1 emergency declaration for Cameroon, which had taken place in light of the previous inter-communal clashes in August, is maintained.
- This decision will help structure the scale up of UNHCR operations' preparedness and response activities to better address the protection needs of refugees, internally displaced persons and other populations affected by this new crisis in the Far North region.

## Far North Cameroon

- As of 12 December, at least 15,125 people are estimated to be internally displaced due to the intercommunal clashes in Far North Cameroon. Since humanitarian access to the area is currently very limited, those figures are likely to be a conservative estimate. There are many women and children among the displaced.
- Many of those who have been forced to flee but remain within Cameroon now live in informal settlements or sleep out in the open, while others have been taken in by families. They are in urgent need of shelter, especially as the current situation risks putting a great strain on generous host communities who already faced widespread poverty. It also exacerbates security risks for internally displaced persons who remain near the zone where clashes took place. Additionally, many people of concern are having difficulties accessing safe water and have no access to latrines, which means serious hygiene problems are quickly arising in Maroua and other places.
- As lead of the protection cluster, UNHCR will coordinate with other actors in order to address key protection concerns for internally displaced persons. The large number of women and children who have specific protection needs will be taken into account when planning the response. The current living situation of internally displaced persons comes with great promiscuity which increases risks of gender-based violence, sexual abuse and exploitation. Education is another key child protection concern, as internally displaced children and youth are no longer able to go to school. Another key issue is documentation, since many internally displaced persons have lost their identity documents and birth certificates when their houses were burned. UNHCR will start registering all children at the civil registry and issuing birth certificates to mitigate long-term risks of statelessness.

## Chad

- As of 13 December 2021, 82,637 individuals from Far North Cameroon are estimated to have arrived in Chad. So far, the Government has maintained its border open and reaffirmed its full commitment to asylum and the humanitarian cause.
- Many new arrivals required immediate medical attention. Health partners, including IRC, ADES and MSF France, have been on the frontline of the medical response.
- Relocation is a priority issue, as it is always safer for those forced to flee to move further away from the border and the zone where the violence originated. Refugees from Far North Cameroon in Chad are currently scattered across 29 different sites, including 19 in urban areas hosting around 54% of the new arrivals. UNHCR estimates that three to four sites are needed to accommodate all the refugees, and is currently working with the authorities to identify suitable locations, in full compliance with land ownership laws.
- UNHCR is providing new arrivals with hot meals, with the support the Red Cross and ADES. On 11 December, WFP also started the distribution of high-energy biscuits (HEB) and meals to affected communities.



CHAD - Influx of refugees from Far North Cameroon. © UNHCR N'Djamena / Chari-Baguirmi province. 13 December 2021.

- Refugees have said that they urgently need mats and blankets, since nights can be very cold at this time of the year in Chad. The stock of core relief items (CRIs) in Chad is currently very limited, and UNHCR is working on airlifting further supplies to the country as soon as possible. Initial distribution of the items available has thus focused on extremely vulnerable individuals or families, as identified through medical or protection referrals. UNICEF has started the distribution of hygiene kits, which are also in high demand, along with kitchen sets.

- A pre-registration exercise has been launched by the Government and UNHCR on 14 December, with the support of the Red Cross. It is currently ongoing and should last for up to two weeks. So far, UNHCR estimates that there is an extremely high proportion of children among the newly arrived in Chad, while a very large majority of the adults are female. The response is thus being planned on the basis of a highly vulnerable population of concern, and accounts for many individuals with specific protection needs, such as pregnant women, elderly people and unaccompanied minors.

## Coordination and Partnerships

### Cameroon

- In order to respond to those acute needs, the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) for first emergency has been activated under the coordination of OCHA. This mechanism is designed to monitor humanitarian action, conduct multisector needs assessments (MSAs) and implement several types of emergency responses. The RRM will lead the Shelter/CRI (core relief items) cluster and work on providing adequate accommodation to internally displaced persons, while UNHCR is planning to lead the protection cluster.
- UNHCR is collaborating with national authorities, OCHA and humanitarian partners in the framework of the RRM to address these operational challenges and organize assistance for IDPs in the areas where access is already possible.

### Chad

- In Chad, UNHCR has designated an Emergency Coordinator and established a task force leading the coordination efforts for a more efficient emergency response. The current situation highlighted the importance of partnerships, since partners who had been present in rural areas since August were able to intervene immediately.
- From 9 December, UNHCR has established a daily operational coordination meeting to share vital information on the unfolding situation and humanitarian needs identified, and start up the coordination of the response. Meetings are held online each evening, bringing together all UN, NGOs and governmental actors involved in the first response. Key partners are the local authorities, CNARR, WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA, OCHA, OHCHR, the

Chadian Red Cross, ADES, various MSF, IRC and Premiere Urgence, ACF, Alina and other NGOs. The partners are increasing daily, reaching some 40 participants on 15 December 2021.

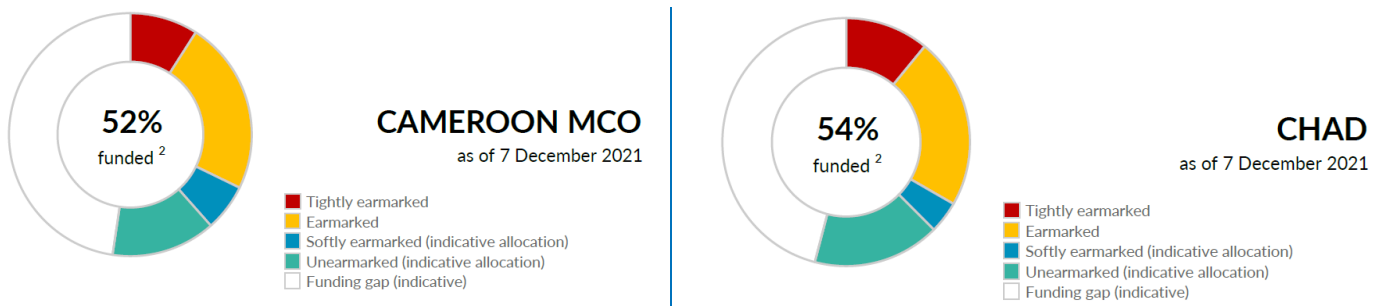
- In addition, UNHCR launched the first three sectoral groups on Food and nutrition, Healthcare and WASH on 11 December. A Protection working group, and a working group on Gender-based violence are due to be put in place next. For the purposes of long-term response planning, shelter, WASH and community-based structures will be important priorities. Energy questions will also be taken into account from the outset, which means that solar energy will be used wherever possible.

## Prospects for durable solutions

- UNHCR recognises that work along the peace-humanitarian-development nexus is needed to truly resolve the crisis. While focusing on the emergency response given the magnitude and urgency of the needs of those who have been forced to flee, UNHCR stands ready to assist all actors partaking in peace, reconciliation and development efforts, especially the two concerned governments and relevant regional organizations.
- During initial discussions with UNHCR, newly arrived refugees in Chad said that a real sense of security and physical safety would be necessary for them to consider returning. They also expressed wishes for disarmament in places of origin as one of the conditions for their return. UNHCR will continue to speak with all relevant stakeholders and place the search for durable solutions at the heart of its interventions.

## Funding situation

Financial resources to respond to the emergency in both countries remain critically low. As of 7 December, both the Chad and Cameroon operation were funded at less than 55%. More support is urgently needed for UNHCR to continue providing life-saving assistance during a crisis that is likely to persist.



### CONTACTS

**Regional Bureau for West & Central Africa (covering Cameroon and Chad)**

**Fatoumata Sinkoun Kaba**, Senior External Engagement Coordinator: [lejeunek@unhcr.org](mailto:lejeunek@unhcr.org),

Tel: +221 78 526 87 14

**Esther Luigi**, Assistant Reporting Officer: [luigi@unhcr.org](mailto:luigi@unhcr.org), Tel: +221 77 150 98 66

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