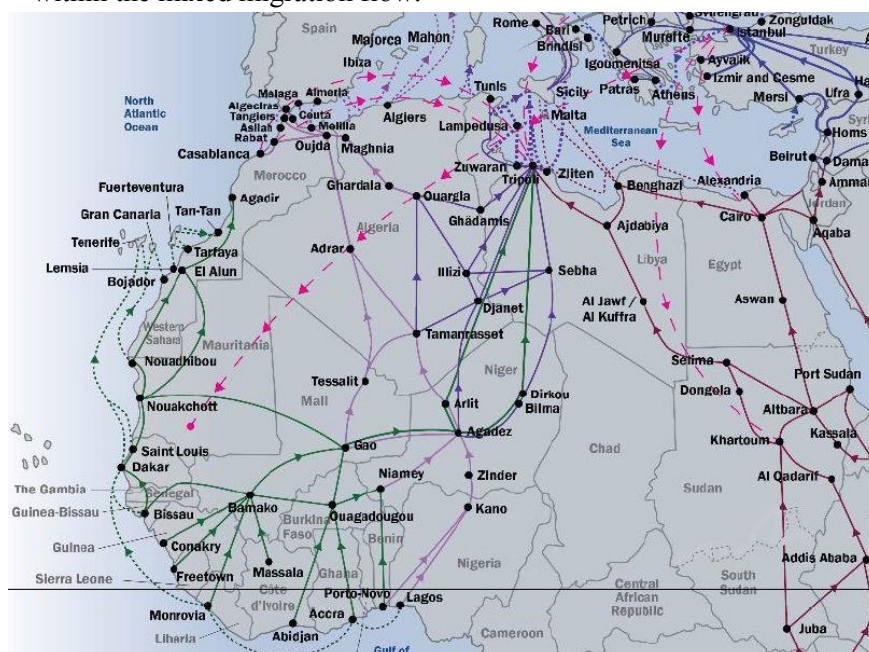


ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES AND MIGRATION IN NIGER

"Few amongst those fleeing persecution and conflict are aware that asylum is possible once they have crossed an international border and that Niger could also be a host country. The first protection measure is to provide them with this information. Therefore UNHCR Niger has on 3 May 2017 opened an office in Agadez, located on the mixed migration cross-roads of Western and Central Africa." Ibrahima Traore, Representative of UNHCR Niger

- Niger is situated in a geopolitically sensitive area, (linking the Sahara desert with the Sahel, and West with Central Africa) and has developed into a major hub of migratory movements northwards to Algeria, Libya and the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to cross into Europe.
- IOM estimates that some 300,000 migrants passed through Niger in 2016. However, according to IOM flow monitoring reports, the tendency is falling since mid-2016, as a stronger approach to combat irregular migration and human trafficking has been adopted by the Nigerien government. It remains however to be seen whether this reduction in outgoing migratory flows observed is due to actual dissuasion of migrants by the measures taken or if it simply reflects the diversification of migratory roads.
- Although Trans-Saharan migration is predominantly not refugee-related, a comparison of main countries of origin of persons transiting Niger (as reported by IOM), with source countries in UNHCR global refugee statistics, shows some overlap. This suggests that a modest percentage of persons fleeing persecution or generalized insecurity are likely to be amongst the mixed migration flow – which is also illustrated by recognition statistics provided by the European Union (see annex). The first 30 referrals by IOM confirm this assumption and UNHCR believes that the enlarging of partnerships with key actors working with migrants will further enhance the identification of refugees within the mixed migration flow.



Mixed Migration routes from West and Central Africa to Europe

(Source: IOM, March 2017)

- Niger accommodates a significant number of *prima facie* refugees from Mali (60,000 individuals) and provides temporary protection to refugees from Nigeria (over 106,000), as well as 438 refugees of other nationalities, who are individually recognized through a refugee status determination procedure (RSD). Per year, Niger receives an average of 100 individual asylum requests, with increasing tendency since 2016.
- Despite the relatively low number of individual asylum requests received over the last years, processing times were excessively long (an average of 19 months). An ongoing UNHCR supported reform of the RSD process and capacity building, have already led to an encouraging impact in terms of the quality of the sessions of the National Eligibility Commission and decisions taken over the last year, as well as to some improvement in the processing time.

OPERATIONAL VISION

UNHCR aims to ensure that persons in need of International Protection among migrants transiting Niger have access to asylum and assistance without resorting to the hazardous journey northwards.

PRINCIPAL RESPONSE COMPONENTS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

- Sensitization/outreach strategy to identify asylum seekers within the mixed migration flow and to inform them about alternative ways to access international protection.
- Information, counseling and legal advice (ICLA) services with a view to offering legal alternatives to hazardous migration.
- Joint referral mechanisms between IOM/UNHCR/GoN and other key actors to facilitate access to International Protection in Niger for asylum seekers identified in the mixed migration flow.
- Capacity building to enhance national Refugee Status Determination procedures (timely decisions/higher quality).
- Enhanced livelihood support to refugees and asylum seekers to allow for socio-economic integration in Niger.
- Resettlement for refugees not able to remain in Niger.
- Anti-fraud safeguards for Refugee Status Determination, Resettlement and Assistance, including a formal complaint mechanism.
- Hotline to provide information, basic counseling, etc.

FIRST ACHIEVEMENTS

- Ongoing improvement of the normative framework for Refugee Status Determination as well as the practical implementation of RSD procedures, which have translated to higher quality of decisions and reductions in the processing time of asylum requests.
- SOPs signed with IOM in early 2016 on the identification and referral of asylum seekers caught in mixed flows.
- MOU (tripartite framework IOM, UNHCR, GoN) signed; and MOUs with the National Agency to Combat Human Trafficking (ANLTP) and UNHCR, as well as NGOs and UNHCR in the course of finalization.
- Increased staffing levels at UNHCR and the General Directorate for Civil Status, Migration and Refugees (DGECRM) as well as a reinforced presence of both actors in Agadez through the opening of an UNHCR office and the creation of a desk to seek asylum at the Regional Directorate for Civil Status, Migration and Refugees.
- Trainings, information sharing, and on the job coaching of the DGECMR and the National Eligibility Commission.
- Joint training for IOM staff and volunteers in Agadez and joint trainings with the ANLTP for magistrates.
- Improved reception conditions through the creation of a “case de passage” for asylum seekers in distress (Niamey).
- Arrival of an experimented NGO, Forum Réfugié COSI (NGO partner), to provide counseling and legal advice services to offer legal alternatives to hazardous migration.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

- Continuous need to expand and consolidate partnerships for effective outreach, identification and communication with persons of concern to UNHCR.
- Need for a better understanding of the profile of the migrants through a partnership with a national socio-anthropological research institution.
- Further actions to ensure that the national asylum framework, including laws and RSD procedures, is in conformity with international asylum standards.
- Very limited number of resettlement places available to cover the resettlement needs of persons at risk in Niger (medical, psychological, protection needs).

Need for a better understanding of UNHCR’s position by the actors engaged in addressing irregular migration.