

Acceleration of the socio-economic integration of Malian refugees

Niger is hosting Malian refugees since the outbreak of the crisis in Northern Mali in 2012. The refugees are living in 3 refugee camps in the Tillabéri region, in a refugee hosting area (ZAR) for nomadic refugees in Intikane, in the Tahoua region, and in urban areas such as Niamey and Ayorou. A second refugee hosting area - Tazalite, was closed by the Government in December 2016 following an attack against the security forces.

Malian refugees are recognized on a prima facie basis and enjoy a favorable protection environment with the right to settle where they wish, to access basic social services and the formal and informal job market.

Due to increasing instability in the regions bordering Mali, a State of Emergency was declared by the Government in several departments in March 2017. This has been extended and prolonged on several occasions. The security situation is impacting dramatically the socio-economic fabric of the areas hosting refugees



UNHCR has 2 Field Offices (Tillabéri and Tahoua) and 2 Field Units (Ouallam and Abala) assisting Malian refugees.

POPULATION STATISTICS

As of the end of June 2019, **56,343 Malian refugees** are biometrically registered in Niger. This ongoing registration operation considerably aids in monitoring population movements and in the provision of adequate protection and assistance. In Tahoua region, notably in the refugee hosting area of Intikane, UNHCR has witnessed on a continuous basis new arrivals coming from Mali. These persons, estimated at 4574, have been pre-registered by the National Commission of Eligibility, UNHCR's counterpart.

A tripartite agreement between UNHCR and the Governments of Niger and Mali signed in 2014, provides a legal framework for voluntary returns in respect of international standards. However, the parties consider that the conditions in parts of Northern Mali are not yet conducive to returns in safety and dignity and therefore UNHCR assists those who wish to return voluntarily with a cash grant.

At the end of April 2019, due to the increasing instability in Burkina Faso, a first group of Burkinabe has arrived in Niger. Today, there are at least over 2000 persons in highly volatile border areas, with an estimated 1000 Nigerians internally displaced.

SECURITY SITUATION

The security situation in the regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua bordering Mali has significantly deteriorated. In parallel, there has been a notable increase in international military presence, to combat terrorism. Despite the signature of a peace agreement in 2015, recurrent confrontations between armed groups and government forces and between various ethnic groups in Northern Mali cause new refugee arrivals and internal displacements in both Niger and Burkina Faso.

For the first time, the insecurity in the regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua has resulted in internal population displacement since the beginning of 2018. In the first half of 2019, **76,634 IDPs** have been reported in areas close to the Mali and Burkina borders. Kidnappings, especially of foreigners, are more recurrent and limit humanitarian access.

OPERATION STRATEGY

Despite the current complex context, UNHCR and the Government of Niger are accelerating the [out-of-camp policy](#). The key orientation defined by UNHCR and the Niger authorities is to work on the logic of 'responsible disengagement', transforming the camps into sustainable settlements. The objective is the closure of the camps by 2020, through the urbanization program, mixing refugees and host population, and providing legal access to land and social housing for the most vulnerable refugees and host communities.

In Tahoua and Tillabery regions, UNHCR has been tasked by the Government to accelerate its existing out of camp strategy in Tillabery, and close the camps. Malian refugees in the camps of Mangaize (7156 persons) and Tabareybarey (10648 persons) should be relocated respectively to the villages of Ouallam and Ayorou. The authorities have also requested to relocate thousands of newly arrived Malians, who are currently residing in Agando, Assagueyguey and Chinouaren to the refugee hosting area of Intikane. This latter site hosts already 19 133 persons.

In the context of prolonged displacement, the assistance and protection strategy for Malian refugees focuses on medium and long term solutions that will promote autonomy, self-reliance, and integration into national service systems. To this end, UNHCR also supports and builds capacity within the Government of Niger.

Furthermore, based on the current situation, the coordination of a strong and robust emergency protection response, both for Malian refugees, the IDPs and the people coming from Burkina Faso is a priority.

MAIN MILESTONES

- Through an extensive targeting exercise by UNHCR and WFP, assistance is being provided based on capacities and vulnerabilities rather than status, with the goal of graduating people out of poverty, and ensuring means of income generation.
- 'Mobile Money' was launched in 2018, with cash through mobile phones being rolled out in Tabareybarey camp, and cash through 'smart cards' in Abala. Internal difficulties with the 2 private partners slowed down the process. However, the 2 modalities will be further developed in 2019. The aim is to improve self-reliance and autonomy. This highlights the benefits of public-private partnership.
- With the support of the GIZ, funds have been secured for the urbanization of the 3 camps of the Tillabery region by the end of 2020 and to build 4,000 social houses for refugees and host population.
- Positive collaboration and partnerships with the Regional Directorates of Health, Education and Hydraulics, to ensure the inclusion of the refugees in national mechanisms.
- Establishment of the 'Guichet Unique' (One-Stop-Shop) in Niamey in 2014, to provide assistance and protection to all urban refugees and asylum seekers in one place (mainly Malian refugees). This is a joint project with the government and several NGO partners. Funds have also been secured to create new One-Stop-Shops in each commune hosting urbanization sites.
- An extensive tripartite collaboration has been developed between the World Bank, the Government of Niger and UNHCR in the framework of the IDA 18.

MAIN CHALLENGES

- Increasing instability in these areas, as well as measures imposed as part of the State of Emergency impact also the self-reliance and food security of the host population, IDPs and refugees. Durable livelihood activities must be supported to ensure an improvement in the autonomy and development of self-reliance of refugees.
- Risk of irregular humanitarian access due to the security situation and military operations.
- Risk of new cross-border displacement, due to the increasing insecurity at the border with Mali and Burkina Faso.

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