

LOOKING BEYOND THE EMERGENCY TOWARD DEVELOPMENT

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

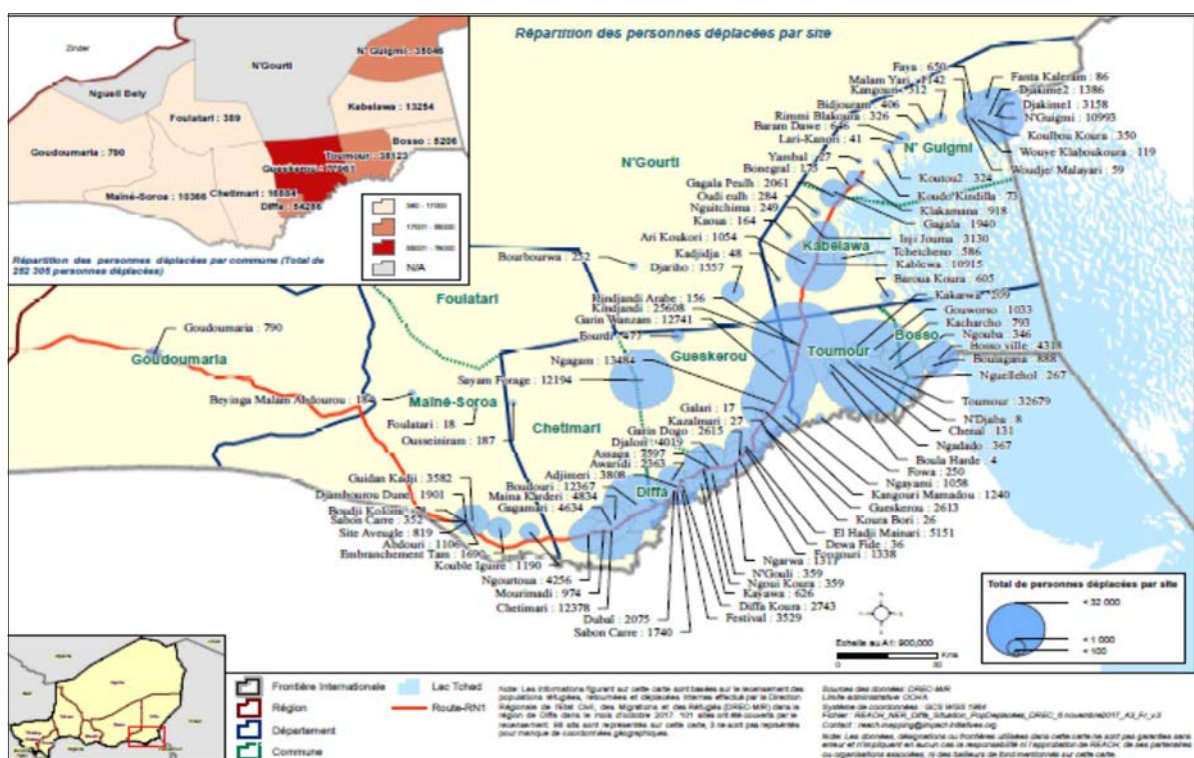
Following the first attacks in the Diffa region, the situation has become increasingly mixed: today, we register Nigerian refugees, returnees (Niger nationals who had migrated but returned to Niger), and IDPs. The majority of the displaced are settled in more than 140 spontaneous sites, villages and 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 Kabelawa. The latter has been 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 themselves. The fertile areas have seen their populations displaced (Lake Chad, Komadougou River), the pastoral routes have been destroyed, and cross-border exchange and trade (seasonal migration, trade of goods) are deeply damaged. 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.

UNHCR has a sub-Office in Diffa town, 5 kilometers from the Nigerian border.

POPULATION STATISTICS

The latest figures released by the government in July 2018 estimate the total displaced population in the region to be around **250,000**. This includes 118,868 Nigerian refugees, 25,731 returnees and 104,288 IDPs. The population of Sayam Forage camp has been biometrically registered by UNHCR and the Government. The total population of the camp is 16,963 at the end of May 2019. BIMS registration is currently being carried out for the entire out-of-camp displaced population in the region, including refugees, IDPs and returnees. As per the end of June 2019, over 201,246 displaced people in the region had been biometrically registered.



SECURITY SITUATION

The security situation has continued to deteriorate and the State of Emergency, declared since 2015, is still ongoing. Although there is a timid economic recovery, repeated suicide attacks, assaults, and incursions perpetrated by Boko Haram since the month of March have resulted in secondary movements of tens of thousands of people within the region. Boko Haram and affiliated armed groups are increasingly turning to kidnappings for ransom in Diffa region, notably in villages bordering the Komadougou river, the islands or the axes leading to markets. Kidnappings of women and girls are more and more recurrent. Additional and secondary displacement due to this heightened risk of kidnapping has been observed.

UNHCR is working with the Government of Niger on a voluntary relocation plan for up to 10,000 persons, to the camp of Sayam Forage. UNHCR is also supporting the Government to seek alternative solutions for the remainder of the newly displaced population.

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 decentralization process;
- **Strengthen the out of camp policy** around the urbanization 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 engage in substantial efforts to strengthen the capacity of the authorities, not only in the management of the crisis but also for recovery/development interventions.
- **Urbanization program:** 7 communes with high density of population are benefitting from an Urbanization 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, and aim to provide 6,000 land parcels, and to construct 4,000 "social houses" for the most vulnerable.
- **Introduction of Gas:** Through a win-win partnership with the Niger private sector, UNHCR introduced gas for domestic energy 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:** Significant improvement in the coordination of protection actors and in the quality of the response, including an important involvement of the community and establishment of effective referral mechanism.

MAIN CHALLENGES

- The hosting areas are generally poorly equipped; **structural and expensive 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**, with a risk of a sharp deterioration in the living conditions of the population in case of a funding shortfall;
- Risk of **irregular humanitarian access** 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.

CONTACTS

Mr. Benoit MORENO, External Relations Officer, morenob@unhcr.org, Tel: +227 92 19 24 17
Mrs. Marlies CARDOEN, Associate External Relations Officer, cardoen@unhcr.org, Tel: +227 80 06 81 51
Mrs. Laurence BRON, Associate Reporting Officer, broni@unhcr.org, Tel: +227 80 09 71 63