

Rapid Briefing Note: Niger - Maradi

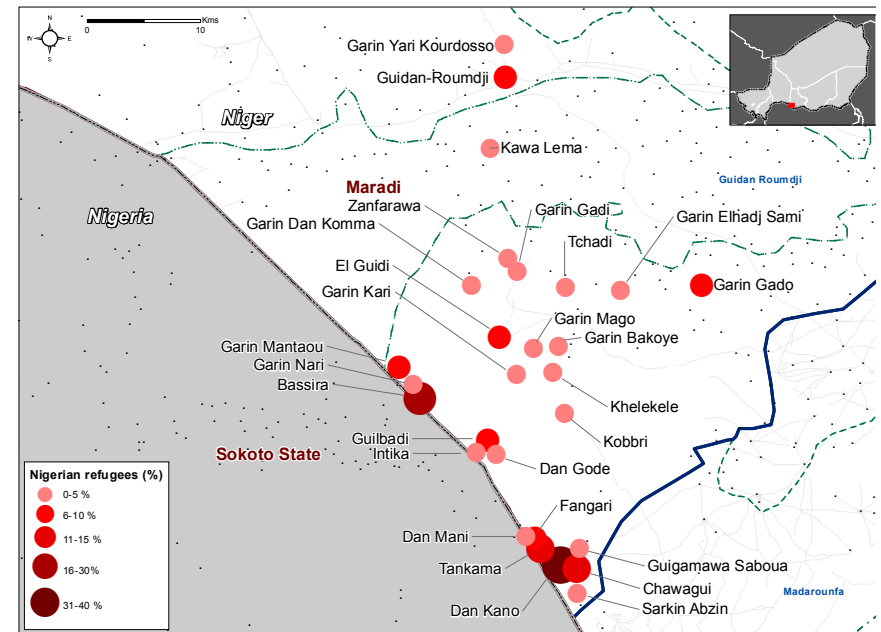
Niamey, 27 June 2019

CRISIS CONTEXT

Following a deterioration of the security situation in North-West Nigeria, almost 25,000 Nigerian refugees have fled to the department of Guidan Roundji, in the Maradi region of Niger, between April and June 2019.¹ The majority of refugees are reportedly women and children.²

The displaced population originates from villages in the state of Sokoto, Nigeria, within a range of 2km from the Nigerian border, and have settled in close proximity to the border.³ Reportedly, the border remains porous and risks of incursions of armed groups remain considerable.³ Most refugees do not have the intention to leave until security has been restored in their home villages.³ In the absence of displacement sites, refugees are staying with host families in Nigerian villages^{2,3,4}. Yet, many host families face difficulties in coping with the recent influx of refugees, as these families often already lack access to basic services.^{2,5}

This briefing note presents findings from a rapid assessment on the humanitarian situation, conducted in a 24-hour timeframe following an alert raised as part of the Migration Emergency Response Fund (MERF) on 25 June. The findings are based on secondary data and 3 Key Informant (KI) interviews carried out from 25-27 June and should be considered as indicative, providing a general overview of the humanitarian situation and needs of the refugee population.



KEY PRIORITIES

Food security and nutrition



The arrival of the Nigerian refugees coincides with the lean season in Maradi, aggravating access to food for the most vulnerable households.

WASH and health



Host and displaced populations face limited access to drinking water and latrines. As health services are limited, diseases might not be treated in a timely manner, while psycho-social support is needed to assist refugees with processing traumas.

Shelter



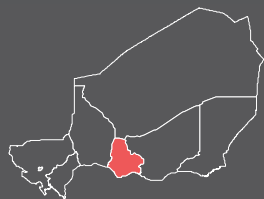
Although most refugees are hosted by local families, a number of them do not have access to shelter and sleep outside in the open instead.

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- Humanitarian actors have limited operational capacity in the region.
- There is a general lack of funds and resources for the response, as a humanitarian crisis in Maradi had not been accounted for in humanitarian planning processes and as many organisations do not yet have a presence in the region.
- Security constraints may arise if the situation deteriorates with incursions of armed groups and/or military operations.

INFORMATION CONSTRAINTS

- While rapid sectoral and multi-sectoral assessments have been carried out, the volatility of the crisis calls for a continuous monitoring of the situation and needs in the area, in addition to open, disaggregated, quantitative data.



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CRISIS IMPACT

Humanitarian needs

The arrival of the refugees has resulted in multi-sectoral humanitarian needs, both for the host and displaced populations. Some initial needs were documented by a UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-led joint needs assessment, conducted on 9 and 10 May 2019, interviewing 6,511 individuals in five localities.³ Yet, it will be important to continue to monitor the situation and detect trends and changes in the humanitarian situation, as well as the needs of the populations in the region.

FOOD SECURITY: The food security situation is already fragile in the region, especially during the lean season (June-September), which coincides with the rainy season (see Figure 1). During this period, the availability of food supplies drops and host and displaced populations face difficulties in their access to food and nutrition.^{3,4} For example, since the displacement crisis started in April, the average number of meals a day reportedly dropped from three to one for adults, and from three to two for children.³

In addition, households have not always developed a stock of food supplies, and available stocks might not always be sufficient, as they reportedly last for a period of maximum two weeks.³ It should be noted, however, that due to favourable market conditions and a good 2018 agricultural season, southern Maradi is currently classified in the category of 'minimal' food insecurity.¹⁵

To respond to the limited access to food and nutrition, the Government of Niger, UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) have estimated that emergency food distributions are needed to avoid a deterioration of the situation.^{3,7} As most refugees have lost their means of subsistence, income-generating activities should be developed in the longer-term to provide refugees with sustainable resources to be able to access food.³

SHELTER & NFIs: The joint assessment cited a "crucial lack of shelter and non-food items (NFIs)", in particular blankets, mosquito nets, mats, buckets, sanitary pads and soap.³ While NFI assistance has been set-up with distributions ongoing or planned^{5,6}, there remains a significant lack of emergency shelters.^{3,5} According to KI interviews, a number of refugees are sleeping in mosques or outside in the open.⁴ In addition, it might not be sustainable to rely on

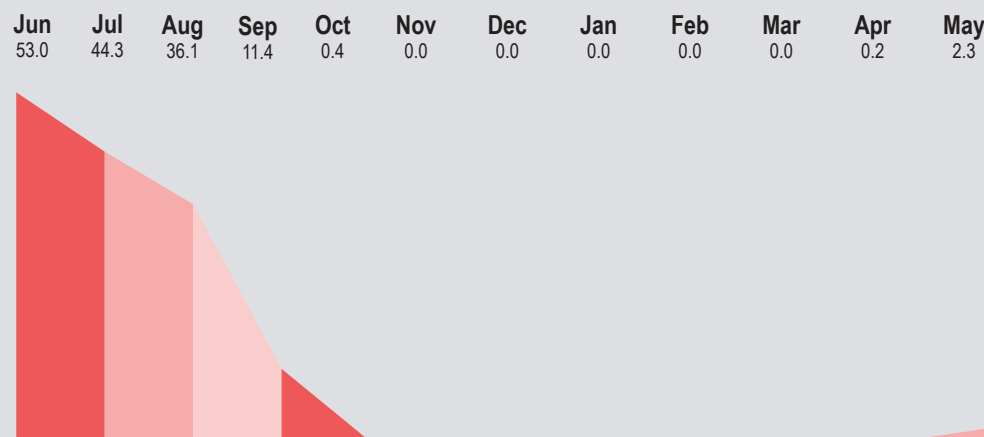
host populations to host the refugees in the long term, considering the limited access to resources and basic services among the host population.⁵

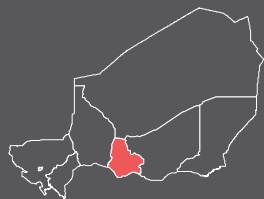
HEALTH: There is a general lack of health centres, and the local population faces difficulties in accessing clinics and medicine.^{3,7} A large number of children have not been vaccinated and concerns related to reproductive health and HIV have also surfaced.⁷

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH): The growing refugee population has put additional pressure on existing water sources, of which the capacity was already limited prior to the crisis. Refugees currently largely rely on surface water, which risks carrying water-borne diseases.⁵ As a result, there is a need to improve existing water sources, envisage water trucking and promote the treatment of surface water.^{3,7,8} Health risks are further aggravated by the lack of latrines, leading to the majority of refugees practicing open defecation.⁵

PROTECTION: Many refugees are in need of psycho-social support due to the violence and insecurity experienced both in their villages of origin as well as during their displacement to Niger.^{3,4,9} In particular, the high number of children and women indicates significant needs in terms of child protection and preventing gender-based violence.⁹

1. TOTAL RAINFALL (MM) IN MARADI, JUNE 2018 - MAY 2019¹³





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Vulnerable groups

- The majority of the refugees are female (58%) and under-age (73%).⁵ Adult men have often stayed behind to protect their property. Yet, there are several reports of women having received no news from their husbands since arriving in Niger.^{3,10} According to one of the KIs, women and children are particularly prone to forced recruitment by non-state armed groups.⁴
- Some of the women and girls have reportedly faced kidnapping, rape and sexual violence and are in particular need of psycho-social support.³ Sexual and gender-based violence still remains a risk among the refugee population, resulting in a need for a mechanism to reference and respond to such incidents and to limit the stigmatisation of survivors.³
- The high number of children among the refugee population are no longer able to go to school. Significant education needs may emerge if children remain displaced after the start of the new school year in October.^{3,6} It should be noted that additional difficulties might be faced by the Nigerian children as schools may teach in French.
- An significant presence of people with specific needs has been recorded among the recently arrived refugees as of June 2019, including pregnant women (364), unaccompanied and separated children (247), disabled people (123), people with a chronic illness (244), elderly persons (538) and people who have experienced torture (826).³
- Key informants reported a risk of stigmatisation of members of some ethnic groups, as they may be accused of committing violence and supporting armed groups.⁴

Crisis drivers

The available secondary data and KIs tend to agree that the violence is not linked to jihadist movements that are active towards the East of the border between Niger and Nigeria, but that it is rather caused by a combination of banditry and inter-communal tensions in the Nigerian states of Sokoto and Zamfara.^{2,5,9} While banditry has been relatively common in northern Nigeria, the

current violence is disproportional to normal trends, as it includes widespread kidnappings, sexual violence and killings.^{2,3,5,10}

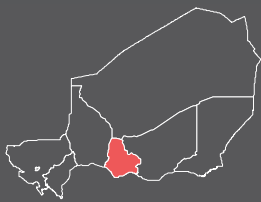
The violence reportedly started with cattle thefts and tensions between herders and farmers in North-West Nigeria; an area that is hard to reach.² In response, Nigerian and Nigerien authorities set up a system to limit theft and manage the cross-border movements of livestock.^{5,10} Yet, the situation deteriorated when the tactics of armed groups changed to kidnappings, which are reportedly perceived as more profitable than cattle thefts.⁵

The exact motives of the bandits and armed groups remain unclear. While most sources claim that these are groups 'without a name or agenda'⁹, some argue that the violence might be exploited by ethnic or religious armed groups.⁴ As most areas of North-West of Nigeria towards the Nigerien border are considered hard to reach, there are significant obstacles in obtaining reliable information.

According to the Nigerien Direction Régionale de l'Etat Civil (DREC), most refugees interviewed cite a lack of security linked to the absence of Nigerian authorities and defence forces as the main reason for their displacement (41%). Fear of assassination or kidnapping are cited as second (25%) and third (18%) reasons.¹⁰

Aggravating factors

The great majority of refugees are hosted by Nigerien households, which are generally already vulnerable and face a lack of resources and basic services, especially in terms of WASH, healthcare and education.^{4,5,9} In certain villages, the number of refugees reportedly exceeds the non-displaced population, resulting in significant added pressure on existing services and resources^{3,5}. Further, refugees arrived at the onset of the lean season, a period where needs are heightened, especially in terms of food security.⁹ Finally, a number of refugees may not have any identification or birth certificate, which complicates their registration and assistance by Nigerien authorities and UNHCR.^{3,5}



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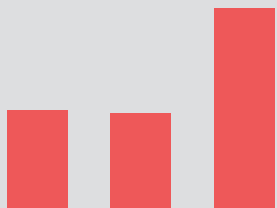
Outlook

Seasonal risks

June to September marks the lean and rainy season in Niger, which poses a number of aggravating risks that could materialise and result in further needs over the next three months. In particular, there is a significant risk of flooding, which affected almost 65,000 people in the region last year (see figure 2), including almost 20,000 in the department of Guidan Roudmji (the fourth most affected department by floodings in Niger in 2018). Furthermore, as the region is prone to disease outbreaks during the rainy season, such as cholera (see figure 3) and is faced with limited WASH infrastructure and services used by a growing population, diseases may more easily spread.⁵ The rainy season also leads to a higher risk of malaria, which is particularly concerning considering the lack of medicines and mosquito nets in the host villages.⁵

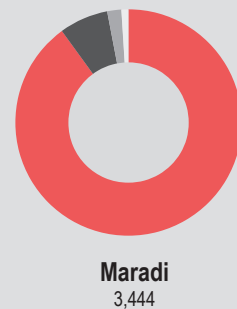
2. NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY FLOODING IN THE MARADI REGION¹¹

2016	2017	2018
32,338	31,260	64,830



3. NUMBER OF CHOLERA CASES IN NIGER IN 2018, BY REGION¹²

Tahoua	Dosso	Zinder
294	65	21



Insecurity and population movements

There is a continued risk of incursions of armed groups from Nigeria, as refugees have settled in close proximity to the porous border between the two countries.⁵ Reportedly, an armed group has threatened representatives of the Nigerian refugees to pay ransom and cease their cooperation with defence forces, or else the armed group would attack the refugees in Nigerien territory.³

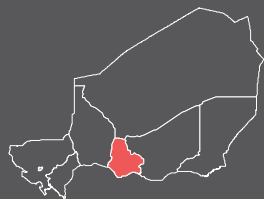
To limit security risks related to incursions and potential attacks, the government and UNHCR are considering to relocate the refugees to a place closer to the centre of the region, at least 50 km away from the border.^{2,3} These “opportunity villages” would be identified on the basis of their capacity to absorb the Nigerian refugees.⁴

In addition, considering the porosity of the border, new waves of violence could erupt, leading to population movements and a further increase in humanitarian needs. According to UNHCR, there is a ‘strong probability’⁹ of renewed displacement, arguing that populations will continue to arrive as long as insecurity along the border persists. Furthermore, potential attacks on the Nigerien side of the border could lead to internally displaced persons in addition to refugees.⁴

However, considering the novelty of the events in North-West Nigeria, trends in violence and displacement are difficult to predict; “the situation evolves and can change at any moment”.⁴ Finally, stability and an effective response might entice more Nigerian nationals to cross the border instead of opting for displacement within Nigeria.⁴

Operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus

As displacement may become protracted, especially in the context of continued insecurity in North-West Nigeria, a more sustainable form of assistance will need to be identified, especially in the framework of a potential relocation to opportunity villages.⁴ The significant presence of development actors prior to the crisis enhances the possibility of operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus, and humanitarian actors are already in discussion with the World Bank and the African Development Bank to unlock resources for when humanitarian needs evolve beyond emergency assistance.⁴



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RESPONSE CAPACITY

Current response

Response set-up and coordination

From the start of the crisis, Nigerien authorities have been working with UNHCR to coordinate the assistance to newly arrived refugees and to manage their registration process.⁵ More than 18,000 persons have already passed through the first stages of registration as of June 2019.^{2,14} In addition, the Nigerien authorities are discussing the security situation in the border zone with the Nigerian government, with a view to facilitate the potential safe and voluntary return of the affected population.⁴ Moreover, several humanitarian coordination meetings have been held in Maradi, co-led by the governor of Maradi and UNHCR.⁵

Based on the UNHCR-led joint needs assessment, an initial three-month response plan has been developed with the objective to provide multi-sectoral humanitarian emergency assistance, targeting 20,000 Nigerian refugees and 7,000 members of the Nigerien host population.⁷ Funds for the 5 million USD plan are currently being mobilised as of June 2019. To coordinate the efforts stipulated in the plan, UNHCR envisages a three-level coordination mechanism (strategic, technical and operational), to be implemented at the national and regional levels, as well as at the level of each area of intervention.⁷

Ultimately, if the crisis persists beyond the initial three-month period, aid actors are looking to ways to provide a more sustainable form of assistance, adopting a humanitarian-development nexus approach.⁴ For example, this would include transitional instead of emergency shelters, income-generating activities and conditional cash transfers.⁴

Emergency response

Emergency response has already been put in motion by a number of actors. The WASH cluster has created an overview of WASH needs and proposed actions.⁸ In addition, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) has carried out a WASH intervention in the framework of the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), raising awareness on WASH practices and distributing Aquatabs to 3,553 beneficiaries at 11 sites.⁴ The Red Cross Society of Niger has requested a Disaster Relief Emergency

Fund to assist 15,000 beneficiaries in six villages, providing mainly health and WASH assistance to both the refugee and host populations.⁵ Generally, health-related assistance is mobilised by the Nigerien government.¹⁴

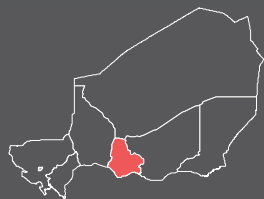
The WFP and the government have been responding to food security and nutrition needs and are carrying out monthly food distributions to support 20,000 people since June.^{5,14} NFI assistance has been set-up and a distribution has been carried out to support 3,396 households by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC),⁴ while other NFI distributions are being planned by a number of NGOs and UNICEF.^{5,6,14}

A number of interventions are envisioned in the area of protection.⁶ The UNHCR response plan aims to prevent and limit the most serious protection risks by securing access to the affected areas, establishing a mechanism to prevent and respond to protection incidents and promoting peaceful coexistence between host and refugee populations.⁷ In addition, several organisations have confirmed that they have resources available to respond to protection concerns, including social workers for psychosocial support and capacity building.^{5,6,14}

Gaps in the response

While there is a gradual increase in humanitarian activity, a number of gaps remain:

- Protection: while certain actors have already expressed their initial availability, continued support will be essential, considering the traumas of the affected population and the large number of refugee women and children.
- Shelter: a number of refugees do not have access to shelter, and with the current lack of clarity on the timing of a potential relocation of the refugees, emergency shelter distributions have not yet started as of June 2019.



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- Education: considering the large number of children, education needs are emerging, particularly with the start of the new school year (2019-2020).
- WASH and health: it will be paramount to prevent new outbreaks of epidemics, in particular cholera, which was present in the region during the past rainy season. The spread of contagious diseases may be aggravated by currently ongoing poor WASH practices.

Humanitarian constraints

- One of the main concerns identified by KIs is the lack of operational capacity. Many humanitarian organisations are not present in Maradi (including UNHCR) and need to deploy staff from other areas in the country.⁴ In addition, there is limited contextual understanding of the area by humanitarian actors, which have largely focused on crises in the Diffa, Tillabéri and Tahoua regions.
- While emergency assistance is being put in place, there is a continued lack of funds and resources for the response, as the response was not taken into account by the Humanitarian Response Plan 2019, while existing crises in the country are aggravating.⁴
- While the area is reportedly accessible, security risks may arise limiting access to the affected populations due to the presence of armed groups and/or military operations.⁴

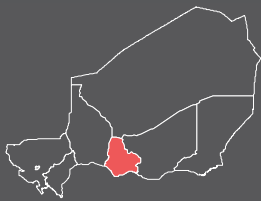
Information gaps and needs

Although the joint needs assessment provides a good basis, there is a general lack of information on the situation and needs, in particular in the following areas:

- A monitoring of the humanitarian situation and quickly evolving needs, as well as representative, quantitative disaggregated data.
- An understanding of the available services and infrastructures and absorption capacity of potential 'opportunity villages'.
- Information about the humanitarian situation and dynamics of violence in North-West Nigeria that has generated the displacement of refugees towards Niger.

NOTES

1. The term 'refugees' is employed in this context to refer to all individuals who have fled from Sokoto State in Nigeria to the region of Maradi in Niger in April and May 2019.
2. UNHCR, "De violentes attaques au Nigéria poussent des milliers de réfugiés à fuir vers le Niger", 28 May 2019.
3. UNHCR and the Republic of Niger, "Situation des réfugiés Nigériens à Maradi : Rapport de la mission conjointe", 21 May 2019.
4. Key informant interviews, carried out on 25 and 26 June 2019.
5. IFRC, "Emergency Plan of Action (EPoA) - Niger: Population Movement", 24 June 2019
6. Protection Cluster Niger, "Cartographie des Intervenants - Zone de Maradi", 5 June 2019.
7. UNHCR, "Plan de réponse à l'afflux de réfugiés en provenance du Nigéria dans la région de Maradi: Résumé", June 2019 (presentation).
8. WASH Cluster Niger, "Récapitulatif du budget des actions immédiates et des actions à moyen terme sur les 12 sites visités", 13 June 2019.
9. UNHCR, "Situation Maradi: Réunion d'information générale/OCHA", 29 May 2019 (presentation).
10. Direction Régionale de l'Etat Civil (DREC) Niger, "Réunion de coordination Maradi: Situation/information générale sur les réfugiés", June 2019 (presentation).
11. Data shared with REACH by the Nigerian Ministry of Humanitarian Action and Crisis Management and the Shelter and NFI Working Group in October 2018.
12. UNICEF, "Aperçu épidémie de choléra & réponse WASH - Niger - 2018", 28 February 2019 (presentation).
13. World Weather Online, "Maradi Monthly Climate Averages", <https://www.worldweatheronline.com/maradi-weather-averages/maradi/ne.aspx> (visited 2 July 2019).
14. UNHCR, "Situation des réfugiés nigériens, région de Maradi : 3W - Qui Fait Quoi et Où ?", 20 June 2019.
15. FAO, "Sahel and West Africa - Cadre Harmonisé", March 2019.



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METHODOLOGY

- This situation brief presents findings from a rapid assessment on the humanitarian situation of Nigerian refugees in Maradi. It was conducted in a 24-hour timeframe following an alert raised by Mercy Corps on 25 June 2019 as part of the Start Network's Migration Emergency Response Fund (MERF). The situation brief aims at informing Start Network members' decision making on whether the alert/funding request should be granted.
- The rapid assessment is based on a review of secondary data, three structured key informant (KI) interviews, and three informal consultations with members of the humanitarian community. Organisations and coordination structures that have been interviewed or consulted include OCHA, UNHCR, the RRM Mechanism, the SNFI Working Group and the WASH Cluster.
- The KIs have been selected on the basis of their expertise on the current refugee crisis in Maradi and the coordination of its response. Interviews were conducted via phone or by Internet with pre-developed and semi-structured questionnaires.
- Several organisations and coordination structures have been consulted to triangulate information and obtain specific information on their sectors or issues of expertise.
- The secondary data review included publicly available information sources (publications, news articles), information sources that have been distributed among cluster and working group members, and sources that have been confidentially shared and of which the information needed to be corroborated.
- Due to the methodology used for the assessment, findings are indicative only, providing a general overview of the current humanitarian situation and needs of Nigerian refugee and host populations.
- Considering time constraints and a lack of available, public data, the humanitarian activities mentioned in this briefing note are likely not exhaustive.

ABOUT REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, you can write to our global office: geneva@reach-initiative.org.

ABOUT START

The Start Network is made up of 40 national and international aid agencies from five continents. Their aim is to deliver effective aid, harnessing the power and knowledge of the network to make faster and better decisions to help people affected by crises. The Migration Emergency Response Fund (MERF) is a UK Aid funded rapid response, context specific, contingency fund run by the Start Network to respond to changes in the context, ongoing gaps and acute needs along the central Mediterranean migration route.