



Situation Brief: Situation of Sudanese nationals and other asylum seekers in Agadez

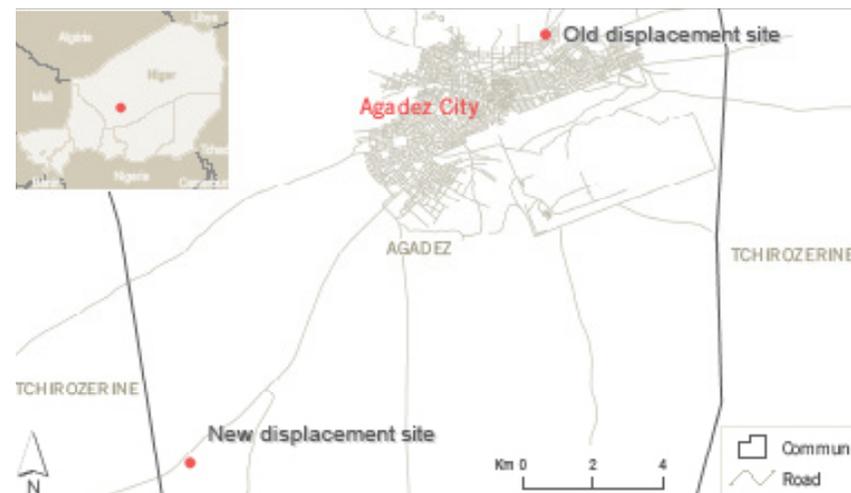
Agadez, Niger - August 2018

OVERVIEW

- This situation brief presents findings from a rapid assessment on displaced persons registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and hosted in Agadez, Niger. It was conducted following an alert raised on 15 August 2018 by *Médecins du Monde Belgique* (MdM) on the relocation of vulnerable groups as part of the Start Network's Migration Emergency Response Fund (MERF). The rapid assessment was based on a mix of primary data collection through Key Informant (KI) interviews and secondary data review (SDR). The situation brief aims at informing Start Network members' decision making on whether the alert and funding request should be granted.
- In Niger, 2,3 million people are in need of assistance and the country is facing a critical humanitarian situation with regard to five major aspects: recurrent floods, conflict-induced displacement, epidemics, food insecurity and malnutrition.¹
- As of 10 August 2018, 2,106 displaced persons have been registered by UNHCR in the city of Agadez.² Part on them are accommodated in six '*cases de passage*' - transit houses - managed by *Cooperazione Internazionale* (COOPI), an Italian non-governmental organisation (NGO) under the supervision of UNHCR, while others live in two displacement sites: one 'old' site located in the city centre and one 'new' site located 13 kilometres (km) away from Agadez, as illustrated on Map 1. While the transfer from the old site to the new site was scheduled for mid-September, some displaced persons were already transferred early August, notably due to the rainy season and social tensions as reported by KIs.

- These sites are managed by the *Direction Régionale de l'Etat Civil pour la Migration et les Réfugiés* (DREC) - the governmental and regional institution in charge of refugees' issues in Niger - with the support of UNHCR through the local NGO *Action pour le Bien Être* (APBE).

Map 1: Location of the old and new displacement sites, Agadez, Niger (Source: UNHCR)



KEY PRIORITIES

WASH

- KIs indicated that **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities** are needed to improve the sanitary and hygiene conditions for the population in the old displacement site

Health

- KIs reported that a **regular medical monitoring** for all the persons in both displacement sites is needed, especially for the most vulnerable cases urgently needing adequate medical care

Protection

- Information collected suggest the need to develop **protection services**, notably to provide adequate assistance to the vulnerable cases identified during UNHCR registration³

Education

- KIs expressed the need to provide **education services** to all children in the three locations (old and new displacement sites as well as transit houses), as they may already be late in their school curriculum due to displacement

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018 - Niger. November 2017. Available here: <http://bit.ly/2OeSU8D>

² UNHCR. Enregistrement et enrôlement biométrique à Agadez. 10 August 2018.

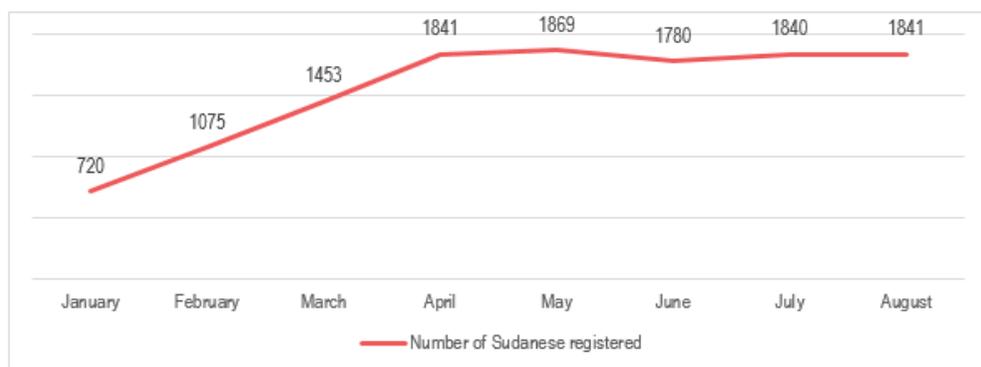
³ Ibid.

CRISIS IMPACT

Crisis drivers

The main crisis driver was reportedly the **spike in arrivals of Sudanese nationals from January to April** (see figure below). KIs explained that neither the local authorities in Agadez nor the humanitarian organisations already present in the city had the capacity to accommodate as many people in such a short period of time.

Figure 1: Evolution of the number of Sudanese nationals registered in Agadez from January to August 2018 (Source: UNHCR)



Aggravating factors

One of the main aggravating factors may be linked to **social tensions between the displaced population and the host community**. According to KIs, the host population complains about the presence of Sudanese nationals in the centre of Agadez and fears for her own security, notably because Sudanese nationals are perceived to be former combatants in Libya. This has led displaced populations to stay confined to a limited space, likely aggravating their living conditions. In addition, asylum procedures for Sudanese nationals have been stopped for the time being and 132 Sudanese nationals were deported back to Libya in May 2018 due to their perceived engagement in illicit activities.⁴

⁴ Eric Reidy. Niger sends Sudanese refugees back to Libya. 10 May 2018. IRIN News. Available here: <https://www.irinnews.org/news/2018/05/10/niger-sends-sudanese-refugees-back-libya>

⁵ UNHCR. Enregistrement et enrôlement biométrique à Agadez. 10 August 2018.

⁶ West Africa Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat. Before the Desert - Conditions and Risks on Mixed Migration Routes through West Africa. July 2017.

The **lack of clarity around the status of the displaced persons registered by UNHCR** may constitute another aggravating factor. A KI notably mentioned that most of them do not have a status yet, even if some have been registered as asylum seekers or refugees in other countries: among the 2,106 persons registered in Agadez, 26 have refugee status in Chad, 1 in Nigeria and 1 in Ghana. In addition, seven have asylum seeker status in Jordan, six in Egypt and two in Israel.⁵ This absence of clear status may have led to a lack of clarity around which actor is responsible to provide assistance to them and delayed the response.

Humanitarian needs

The humanitarian needs of the persons registered by UNHCR were found to differ according to their current accommodation situation.

- **Humanitarian needs in transit houses:** According to KIs, **education** and **clothes** are the two main unmet humanitarian needs in the transit houses. Children that are accommodated in the transit houses do not reportedly have access to education, only to recreational activities organised by COOPI.
- **Humanitarian needs at the old displacement site:** One of the main humanitarian needs is the **lack of healthcare**, in particular prenatal consultations for pregnant women and vaccinations. **Nutrition monitoring** is also needed, according to one KI, as the eating habits may change between the country of origin and Niger. **WASH conditions** were also reported to be a main concern, especially in relation to latrines' hygiene, with key non-food item (NFI) needs including soap, buckets and sponges. KIs further highlighted **protection concerns** as the site is overcrowded. Some displaced persons are also likely to be suffering from **injuries and/or psychological trauma** as the migration routes through West Africa are known to be highly dangerous.⁶
- **Humanitarian needs at the new displacement site:** While all basic needs are met according to KIs with information on this site, it is likely that not all services are functional yet as the site is unfinished, which could in turn mean that not all humanitarian needs of those already living there are met.

Population profile and vulnerable groups

According to the registration and biometric enrolment conducted by UNHCR, **Sudanese nationals represent 87% of all the displaced persons registered in Agadez.**⁷ The majority are originally from Darfur.⁸ Many reportedly travelled to Libya in recent years in search of economic opportunities, or with the intention to cross the sea to Europe. They then left Libya because of the harsh living conditions they experienced there, with reports of torture, human trafficking and/or persecutions.⁹ They reportedly came to Niger because they considered it as the closest safe country. Different articles also suggest that a programme in Niger evacuating the most vulnerable refugees from Libyan detention centres and resettling them to Europe - the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) launched in November 2017 - also played a part in attracting Sudanese nationals to Agadez.¹⁰ Another part of the Sudanese nationals in Agadez come from Chad where they had previously been registered in refugee camps. According to KIs, they travelled to Niger due to a return programme that facilitates the return of Sudanese refugees to country of origin. Others reportedly came to Niger to work in mining sites.

Some of the displaced persons registered in Agadez present vulnerabilities.¹¹ Among them, 16% are female and 25% are minors. Almost half of them are without occupation (42%); when they do have an occupation, they are most commonly farmers (seeds and vegetables) (23%). This occupation could represent a vulnerability as it may be more difficult for them to resume their activities as they would need a land and tools to do it and they probably left these behind when leaving their village of origin. In addition, an important proportion of this population does not have education: 29%.

The results of the registration also highlight several profiles with specific needs:

Table 1: Profile with specific needs among the persons registered by UNHCR in Agadez¹²

		%
Person requiring specific legal and physical protection	90	4.3
Woman at risk	54	2.6
Sexual and gender-based violence survivor	16	0.8
Single parent	10	0.5
Person with disability	32	1.5
Person in serious medical condition	35	1.7
Older person at risk	9	0.4
Torture survivor	68	3.2
Unaccompanied or separated child	224	10.7
Child at risk	33	1.6
Person separated from their family	6	0.3

Outlook

Following the visit of high profile UNHCR representatives in Agadez at the end of June 2018, a forum was organised on 4 July 2018 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the regional authorities and UNHCR to discuss the situation of the Sudanese population and other potential asylum seekers in Agadez. During this forum, **the government of Niger and UNHCR reached an agreement** on the response to be provided to them.¹³ The main points of the agreement are the following:

- Transfer to a new site: According to a KI, as of the end of July, two months would be needed to render this site operational. It would have the capacity to welcome 2,000 individuals. This KI also reported that UNHCR plans to ask for an extension of the site if the number of arrivals continue to increase. All the persons that are currently in the old site and in the transit houses will reportedly be moved to this new site in mid-September 2018. One or two transit houses will be kept and used to welcome the most vulnerable cases.

⁷ UNHCR. Enregistrement et enrôlement biométrique à Agadez. 10 August 2018.

⁸ Eric Reidy. Niger sends Sudanese refugees back to Libya. 10 May 2018. IRIN News. Available here: <https://www.irinnews.org/news/2018/05/10/niger-sends-sudanese-refugees-back-libya>

⁹ Sertan Sanderson. Rumors feed a surge in migrants to Agadez. 28 February 2018. Info Migrants. Available here: <http://www.infomigrants.net/en/webdoc/88/rumors-feed-a-surge-in-migrants-to-agadez>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ UNHCR. Enregistrement et enrôlement biométrique à Agadez. 10 August 2018

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UNHCR Niger. 'A Agadez, tensions et craintes font place au dialogue, et à la recherche de solutions. 14 July 2018. Available here: <http://unhcniger.tumblr.com/post/175879504719/a-agadez-tensions-et-craintes-font-place-au>

Early transfers of persons reportedly already took place at the beginning of August: 216 persons on 8 August and 110 persons on 14 August, all Sudanese men. They were reportedly sleeping in the open nearby the old site due to a lack of capacity. They have been moved to the new site due to social tensions between the displaced population and the host community. Other reasons mentioned by KIs for this early transfer are the rainy season and the fact that it is now increasingly dangerous for people to stay outside without any shelter. Some KIs reported the transfers will now stop until the buildings on the new site are finished, while others said that new transfers are likely to continue due to the rainy season. It is also likely that if new persons arrived in Agadez, they will be transferred to the new site as the old displacement site does not have the capacity to accommodate them.

- Profiling by UNHCR and the DREC of the most vulnerable cases who will be allowed to apply for asylum in Niger. UNHCR will provide the DREC with additional staff to facilitate the profiling. According to KIs, the profiling will be conducted on a case by case basis and will be accompanied by security checks on the person's background. It will be conducted before the transfer of every person to the new site.

Following this profiling, the procedure for seeking asylum should reopen for Sudanese nationals after having been suspended since March 2018. However, KIs reported that the exact date on which the *Commission Nationale d'Eligibilité* - the national commission reviewing asylum requests - should start again reviewing Sudanese files is yet to be determined.

RESPONSE CAPACITY

Current response

As mentioned previously, displaced persons registered by UNHCR are accommodated in transit houses, as well as in two displacement sites.

- Response at transit houses:**

Since 1 January 2018, COOPI manages under the supervision of UNHCR six transit houses accommodating around 600 persons, with around 90% of them being from Sudan. They usually remain in these houses for three months, the time for their asylum application to be examined. However, KIs reported that Sudanese nationals have been staying in the transit houses over longer periods, due to the review of their asylum applications being on hold. As the transit houses have limited capacity, beneficiaries are selected based on vulnerability criteria: as such, most of the persons accommodated in the houses are women and children.

In terms of assistance in the transit houses, COOPI provides housing, food assistance three times a day, psychological support, language lessons and recreational activities. Displaced persons also have access to a mental health referencing system. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) supports them for cases to restore family links. In addition, APBE provides medical assistance and UNICEF distributed NFI kits, including soap and buckets, and recreational kits, including toys for children.

- Response at old displacement site:**

Located in the city centre, the site accommodates those that have not been selected for transit house assistance and that have not been moved to the new site yet. No consensus on the numbers and profiles of displaced persons living in this site could be found during the assessment. KIs estimated between 700 to 1,000 persons living in the site. Some said that it only accommodates men, while others mentioned the presence of women and children, and even pregnant women. As the site does not have the capacity to accommodate all the persons arriving in Agadez, some persons are sleeping in the open, including women according to some KIs.

Table 2: Types of assistance provided in the old displacement site, by actor

Actors	Type of assistance
UNICEF	_ NFI kits distribution, recreational kits distribution for children
Gouvernorate	_ NFI kits distribution
Animas Sutura	_ Hygiene kits distribution
MdM	_ NFI kits distribution, installation of water tanks that are regularly supplied, vaccination of 1,200 persons against yellow fever and meningitis
APBE	_ Site management, food assistance three times a day

If some displaced persons are willing to return to their country of origin, they are referred to the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) for their voluntary return programme.

- Response at the new displacement site:**

Since the end of July 2018, UNHCR launched landscaping projects in this new site, including building prefabricated shelters and latrines. As mentioned previously, it would need two months to be operational and would have the capacity to welcome around 2,000 persons. However, more than 300 persons have already been transferred to this new site, all Sudanese men.

Table 3: Types of assistance provided in the new displacement site, by actor

Actors	Type of assistance
UNHCR	_ Shelters with sun lamps, NFI Kits distribution
Gouvernorate	_ Mobile toilets
MdM	_ 10 water tanks supplied by a system of water trucking
APBE	_ Food assistance three times a day

Picture 1: Prefabricated shelters and latrines in the new displacement site



Picture 2: NFI kits distributed by UNHCR in the new displacement site



Source: UNHCR Niger- August 2018

Assistance that will reportedly be provided when the new displacement site is operational: prefabricated shelters, latrines, boreholes with a power generator, water tanks with water stocks, a kitchen block, a nursery, recreation areas, sheds, washing areas, and sunlamps.

Gaps in the response

The gaps in the response are linked to the actors' lack of capacity to cover all the humanitarian needs of the displaced persons. Most interventions seem to address specific needs on an occasional basis. In addition, some KIs expressed concerns over the highly likely arrivals of new persons on the sites that may even further strain current resources.

More specifically and based on KI interviews, the gaps in the response by sector are the following:

- **Education:** no education services is provided to children neither at the transit houses nor at both displacement sites
- **Healthcare:** while medical assistance is reportedly provided in the transit houses, medical monitoring in both displacement sites is needed according to KIs. They notably mentioned that vulnerable cases as pregnant women do not receive appropriate medical care
- **Protection:** no protection services have been reported in both displacement sites by KIs despite the presence of vulnerable profiles identified in the registration conducted by UNHCR¹⁴
- **WASH:** WASH infrastructures as well as the hygiene and sanitary conditions in the old displacement site reportedly need to be improved, in particular with regard to the latrines. According to KIs, WASH NFI kits should be distributed on a regular basis

Humanitarian constraints

Based on interviews with KIs, the fact that the new displacement site is located outside the city centre does not represent a constraint to access the site and to develop activities. However, further coordination with the government will be required to develop an appropriate response, taking into account potential social tensions between the host community and the displaced population.

Information gaps and needs

There appears to be a lack of information concerning the number and profile of the population accommodated in the transit houses and in the old displacement site, as well as on the number of people staying outside the old site.

One KI also mentioned that there is a lack of information on the needs of the affected population. A more detailed assessment to understand these needs would reportedly be very useful to inform more effective humanitarian action.

NEXT STEPS - KEY PRIORITIES

Based on information collected, the key priorities were found to be the following:

- Develop **WASH activities** in the old displacement site to improve the sanitary and hygiene conditions for the population living there
- Develop a **regular medical monitoring** in both displacement sites, especially for the most vulnerable cases that urgently need adequate medical care
- Ensure that the **new displacement site and all its services are fully operational** before transferring all the persons from the old displacement site and the transit houses to this new place
- Provide **education services** to all children in the three locations, as they may already be late in their school curriculum due to displacement
- Keep potential **social tensions** between displaced persons and the host community in mind when developing activities and try as much as possible not to exacerbate them
- Provide **assistance to the vulnerable host population**, including as a potential way to diffuse tensions
- Reopen the **asylum procedures** for Sudanese nationals, or find other durable solutions as an alternative
- Develop **protection services** notably in order to provide adequate assistance to the vulnerable cases identified by UNHCR

¹⁴ UNHCR. Enregistrement et enrôlement biométrique à Agadez. 10 August 2018.

METHODOLOGY

- This situation brief presents findings from a rapid assessment on the situation of displaced persons in Agadez, Niger. It was conducted following an alert raised by MdM on 15 August 2018 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 was based on a mix of primary data collection through KI interviews and SDR.
 - Concerning the primary data collection, 3 KIs were interviewed on 15 August within a 24h timeframe after the alert was raised. KIs have been purposively selected beforehand on the basis of their expertise on migration in the national and local context. They included humanitarian aid workers and governmental officials, and are either based in Agadez or in Niamey. Interviews were conducted via phone with pre-developed and semi-structured questionnaires. Some interviews with KIs (4) were also conducted in advance in order to provide a better understanding of the context in which the alert may be raised.
 - SDR was carried out on a regular basis before the alert was raised. It includes journalistic and academic articles, as well as reports from humanitarian actors. It was used to triangulate primary data.
- Due to the methodology used for the assessment, findings are indicative only and cannot be generalised for the entire displaced population in Agadez.

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 NETWORK

The Start Network is made up of 42 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.