

UNHCR concerned for the protection of thousands of civilians and refugees forced to flee the latest violence in Niger

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and its partners are scrambling to reach thousands of civilians forced to flee, following a deadly attack on Chinagodiar, the latest in a worrying increase of insecurity in Niger's Tillabéri region.

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Following a large-scale attack last week against the Nigerien town of Chinagodiar, 20 kilometres from the border with Mali, an estimated 7,000 civilians including 1,000 refugees have been forced to flee their homes, in search of safety.

We are receiving accounts of people being given an ultimatum by armed groups to leave the area, of civilians being targeted, kidnapped or killed, of properties being looted.

All those displaced are reported to have fled with little more than the clothes on their back, leaving behind their homes and possessions. They are in urgent need of food, water and shelter, as well as sanitation, protection and security.

In Niger, an estimated 5,000 people are seeking protection in the nearby towns of Banibangou or Oualam, an area which currently hosts 7,326 Malian refugees.

An estimated 1,000 refugees, including unaccompanied children, are also reported to have crossed into Mali in the border town of Andéraboukane, in Ménaka region, where local communities have already shown solidarity by providing food to those most vulnerable. Several hundred Malians, many who were in Niger for their trade, also fled the border area, fearing confrontation between security forces and armed groups. The region is already hosting 1,024 refugees who had fled Niger following earlier violence in 2018.

Insecurity in these areas severely hampers our ability to reach the affected population, those forced to flee and the communities hosting them. Without humanitarian access, we cannot bring them the assistance they desperately need: protection, shelter, food, water, access to basic services such as health, education, let alone working towards solutions.

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In the Sahel, protection of those forced to flee must be at the core of the response to this displacement crisis.

At the end of last year, the governments of the region adopted the Bamako Declaration and reaffirmed their commitments to protect displaced populations in a context of counterterrorism operations. The declaration recommended better coordination between civilian and military to ensure humanitarian access for immediate assistance, creating the conditions for humanitarian and development actors to provide durable solutions to the affected population, and protecting the asylum space for those fleeing conflict.

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