

Emergency Transit Mechanism

Background

In November 2017, UNHCR established for the first time an Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) for the evacuation of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers from detention in Libya to Niger. The programme was established in order to facilitate the processing of refugees and asylum seekers trapped in detention and to ensure access to protection and to durable solutions.

UNHCR and the Government of Niger signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in December 2017, temporarily expanding the Niger asylum space to these refugees and asylum seekers. This MoU has been extended in February 2020 for another two-year duration.

Context

Evacuations

Refugees and asylum seekers in Libya are identified for eventual solutions outside Libya based on their vulnerabilities. While in the past evacuees were either directly evacuated from detention centres or through the Gathering & Departure Facility (GDF), persons are at the moment selected mostly from urban settings with a history of being in a detention centre before being released. This is due to ensure no negative coping mechanisms are sought as well as to advocate for the 'end of detention policy' in Libya. The persons of concern are screened and their personal information is shared with UNHCR Niger.

The first evacuation flight took place on the 11th of November 2017. Since then, 27 more evacuation flights have arrived from Libya to Niger, carrying a total of **3,361** refugees and asylum seekers.

Process and living conditions in Niger

Once the refugees and asylum seekers arrive in Niger, UNHCR conducts a verification interview and registers them biometrically. This is followed by refugee status determination (RSD) procedures by the Government of Niger and UNHCR. Finally, interviews to prepare resettlement files are completed by UNHCR. These files are then submitted to third countries for consideration. For unaccompanied children, a Best Interests Determination (BID) is completed to seek the most appropriate solution.

UNHCR and partners provide accommodation in the ETM transit facility in the commune of Hamdallaye, Tillaberi region (40km from Niamey) where food, medical care, education and psychosocial support are readily available. On 4 March 2019, a first group of 120 evacuees were transferred to the Hamdallaye center, constructed for a maximum capacity of 1,500 persons. For particular vulnerable cases, such as persons with medical follow-up requirements, advanced stage of pregnancy or mother with newborn babies, three guesthouses remain operational in the city of Niamey. Durable construction and development of the transit facility is ongoing.



Health Center, Child Friendly Space and Learning Center in Hamdallaye

Empowerment & Philosophy of Care

Educational/vocational training has started in 2019 with partner INTERSOS targeting 45 unaccompanied minors (30 in mechanics, 15 in esthetics: <https://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/videos/2020/7/5f103b6c4/niger-a-style-all-his-own-refugee-teen-hairdresser-grooms-for-life-after.html>). Partner Good Neighbors launched a farm-up project allowing 42 refugees and 40 persons from the host community to be trained in market gardening.

Since February 2020, the ETM team is piloting the use of cash for food for 28 households who have specific dietary needs in guesthouses and in Hamdallaye through mobile money. This pilot project is being expanded to the whole population. Currently, 152 persons benefit from it.

In order to respond to refugees and asylum seekers psychological and physical needs, UNHCR is developing a *Philosophy of Care* through psycho-social, mental health, sport and recreational activities (traditional dance classes, music and singing sessions, theatre workshops, etc). UNHCR intends to mitigate distress and help them to cope better and resume their normal lives in dignity. Sports facilities, which include a soccer field, a basketball court and a handball field were generously donated by the AC Milan Foundation.



Breakdance Class with World Champion Bboy Lilou (left) and (opening ceremony with AC Milan in Hamdallaye)

Resettlement Missions

Following screening of the files in resettlement countries, the responsible parties of the governments of third countries undertake a mission to Niger to interview those under consideration for resettlement. The results of the interviews are communicated to UNHCR Niger following the resettlement mission. Some resettlement countries may decide based solely on the file shared with them by UNHCR, and do not necessarily undertake a resettlement mission to Niger. As a consequence of COVID-19 pandemic, States are encouraged to increasingly use the modalities of dossier processing and remote interviews. Some key States are already implementing these processing modalities including Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Italy.

Resettlement & other durable solutions

If accepted, the transport of the refugees to a resettlement country is organized by the logistical partner IOM. Other durable solutions considered include humanitarian and/or study visas, as well as family reunification.

The resettlement of refugees evacuated from Libya to Niger is part of UNHCR's overall resettlement programme. Refugees who were already present in Niger and deemed to require resettlement as a solution, are also included in the programme. Globally, resettlement is one of three solutions pursued by UNHCR, the others being voluntary return or local integration.

Resettlement Pledges & Departures

UNHCR has received a total of **6,351** resettlement pledges for the Libya-Niger/Rwanda situation out of which 1,131 confirmed pledges are for ETM Niger evacuees and 450 for refugees registered in Niger. The following countries have provided confirmed pledges for Niger: Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

As of 1 December 2020, a total of **2,729** evacuated refugees have departed from Niger to resettlement countries. Due to COVID-19, resettlement flights had been suspended in March and took up again in August 2020. In total,

UNHCR has received 1,530 confirmed pledges for ETM PoCs in Niger in 2020, out of which 1,030 are for ETM and 500 for non-ETM.

COVID-19

Due to the closure of Niamey by the Government of Niger as a preventive measure on 29 March, the ETM centre in Hamdallaye became a place of self-isolation with limited in/out movements of persons of concern and staff until 13 May. Services were provided by essential partners, such as APBE, INTERSOS and Forge Arts with awareness sessions on COVID-19 preventive measures, maintenance of all hand washing devices and medical services.

In 2019, NGO Forge Arts trained and equipped more than 286 women to produce and commercialize liquid soap, bleach and water containers. Since March 2020, more than 360 refugees and persons from the host community have been trained to produce soaps, bleach and masks that have been distributed within the transit centre and to local authorities and populations in the Beri Koira village. This activity, beyond giving them the opportunity to be part of the solution, has become a valid alternative to the many psychosocial activities forced to be put on hold due to the COVID-19 emergency. Thanks to a generous contribution by private donors, the project will be extended, giving them the opportunity to produce their own hygienic products and be actively part of the response to the pandemic.

The group "Poings Levés", gathered around Nigerien artist Danny Lee produced a song for Covid-19, *Protect your Life* (<https://news.un.org/fr/story/2020/05/1068342>) with the support from UNHCR Niger. The clip includes ETM evacuees that are part of the national prevention response by making soap.

Heavy Rains & Flooding in the Sahel

The heavy rains and consequent flooding in the Sahel impacted the access to the ETM centre between August and October 2020; the road being cut off depending on the water level. Activities were disrupted with a "minimum service" maintained thanks to the partners and the mobilization of community leaders.

Partners:



Funding

- **EUR 30 million EUTF** funding received since December 2017
Initially it was foreseen that EUR 8 million will be used for setting up an ETM in Burkina Faso, however with the official notification received by the Government of Burkina Faso in March 2019, the EUR 8 million were allocated to the ETM Niger by the EU.
- **EUR 15 million EUTF** top-up has been approved by the EUTF to continue until June 2021.

Donors:

Special thanks to:

Canada | European Union | Italy | Luxembourg | Monaco | United States of America | AC Milan Foundation | Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation | Fondazione Prosolidar Onlus | Fondo di Beneficenza Intesa San Paolo

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LINKS

UNHCR country operation page - Twitter

For additional information, please see the Libya-Niger situation factsheet available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/asmwa>