

Protection Sector - UNHCR

An Analysis of Forcibly Displaced Persons in Far North Cameroon

February 2024

Insecurity caused by the non-state armed groups, counterinsurgency, and seasonal natural disasters continue to impact civilian lives, undermining protection and limiting access to basic social services.

As of January 2024, there remain over 450,000 IDPs in the Far North, the majority living under strenuous and challenging humanitarian situation. Nevertheless, after ten (10) years of displacement, some progress has been made to find durable solutions for some 450,000 IDPs in the Far North, particularly in opening a dialogue on possibilities for all three solutions and engagement across actors not seen before, including Government, humanitarian and academia.

A series of assessments have been conducted by the Protection Cluster based on the 8 Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC) criteria to measure durable solutions in the departments of Logone Chari (Tilde), Mayo Sava (Kolofata), and Mayo Tsanaga (Zamai). Focus groups discussions was conducted with over 200 IDPs, diverse in age, gender and abilities. Woman, men, elderly, children, persons with disabilities, and community leaders were consulted on their intention to return to their areas of origin or seek other solutions, as well as their current displacement situation.

Findings show that the populations were primarily concerned about security (Kolofata), social cohesion and tension between host communities and IDPs due to competition over resources (Tilde and Kolofata), and access to land for livelihood activities (Zamai). Most raised their concerns that humanitarian assistance is not extended to host communities. Freedom of movement was also of raised; many lack civil documentation due to the administrative hurdles and affiliated costs.

Their most acute needs were adequate housing in displacement and in eventual solutions locations. Shelters are poorly constructed, needing yearly renovation. The lack of shelter results in overcrowding with several families living under the same roof; on average some 5 – 8 persons reside in congested and squalid conditions. Only 10% of children had access to schooling, and access is hindered by the school fees or birth certificate. Durable solutions intentions varied greatly by location; in Kolofata most expressed their intention to return, in Zamai to relocate, and in Tilde to locally integrate.

Arrivals from Chad

On 22-23 February, 250-300 families comprising 2,300 individuals from the village of Gamal-Tapalai, Chad crossed the Logone for security reasons and in protest over land and property taken over by high level military official.

According to the newly arrived, they faced threats against their physical security, livelihoods, and well-being. Their immediate return to Chad appears unlikely, as they were reportedly barred from accessing their homes and property. The situation needs to be monitored and an inter-agency mission to examine needs took place 28 February.

Arrivals to Minawao Refugee Camp

There has been a noticeable decline in arrivals at Minawao since the peak in September 2023 (see Figure 1 below). Approximately 300 persons arrived at the Gouenguel Transit Center between January and February 2024. Reasons for the decline are potentially linked to change in military border practices (no longer referring all Nigerians to Minawao), overcrowding of camp, and the disruption of food security programs. Security was once again the main reasons for moving to Minawao (80%) (orange line below in Figure 1.)

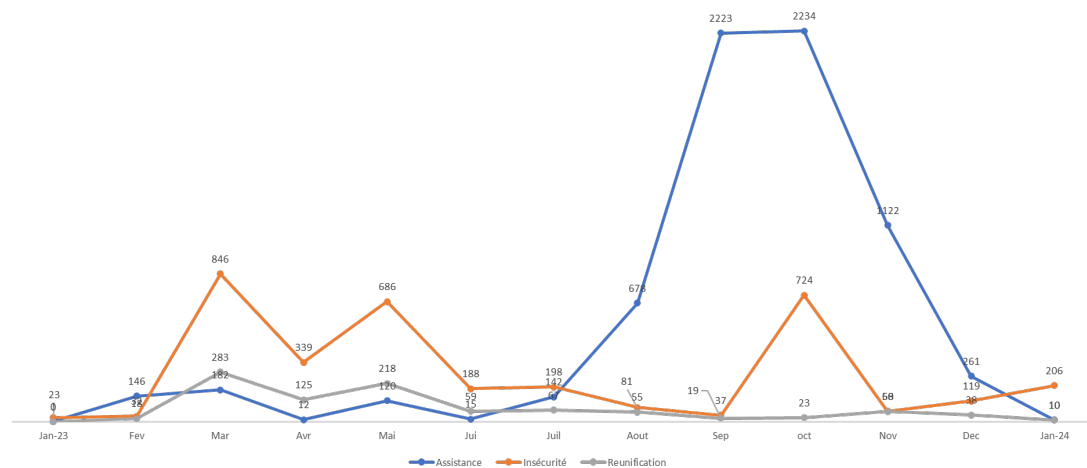


Figure 1: Arrivals per month and reasons : Minawao Refugee Camp

Refugee Returns from Chad

Since early 2022, over 22,500 Cameroonian refugees have returned from Chad to their home communities in Logon-Birni, having fled the intercommunal violence of August and December 2021, some 13,000 in 2022 alone. Nevertheless, as of late 2023, some 26,000 Cameroonians remained refugees in Chad. In December 2023 UNHCR launched a programme to assist spontaneous returnees, while progress on the Tripartite Agreement Chad-Cameroon-UNHCR continued. Since the launch of the programme, some 9,500 refugees have returned to Cameroon (2,000 in December 2023 and 9,500 in January and February 2024). Returnees are welcomed by communities and local authorities.

Returning refugees received 20,000 XAF per person in Chad to cover costs of transport. Upon confirmation of arrival in Cameroon, done by UNHCR using biometric identification, returnees received another 20,000 XAF per person to support reintegration. To ensure a durable return and to further support peace in Logon Birni, returnees will need integration into social cohesion activities, and into development and resilience programming. Civil documentation is also an issue as many of the returnees lost their documents in the violence, or never had any.

Key Messages

Humanitarian Country Team

- Advocacy with the government to develop a Strategy on Return, Reintegration (includes local Integration) and Resettlement with the support of the humanitarian community,
- Plan for the integration of returnees into existing and new programmes.

Donors

- Provide financial support to the durable solutions for the protracted and mixed situation in the Far North.