Over the past decades, the issue of migration has considerably increased in Niger. The movement of migrants through the Sahara Desert continues to have a devastating toll on human life with many dying on their way across the desert – a journey which entails severe risks, such as extra judicial killings, death through dehydration and starvation, extortion, torture, sexual violence and exploitation, and forced labor. Children on the move are exposed to multiple risks, which make them extremely vulnerable, especially when they are having to move outside of safe and legal pathways, and are unaccompanied and/or separated.

A SOURCE COUNTRY FOR MIGRANTS TO ALGERIA

Niger is a source country for migrants to Algeria, mostly consisting of adults (often women) accompanied by young children, most of them are from Kantché District in Zinder Region in southern Niger. These children are often used to generate income for the adults through begging. This comes at a high cost for children who are deprived of schooling and beaten if they do not collect enough money. The Nigerien and Algerian Governments signed an agreement in 2014 for their repatriation. Since then, more than 32,000 migrants – including children, have been repatriated to Niger. These children have returned to their region of origin, where basic services such as education and health are fragile or non-existent, where there are very limited livelihood options for young people and few opportunities for income generation.

RETURNEES FROM LIBYA

According to IOM, as of June 2018, about 679,897 migrants have been identified in Libya (mostly in the region of Tripoli), including 54,392 children. 33% of these children are unaccompanied. Around 4,574 of the migrants are reported to be in detention centres. More than 40 nationalities have been identified, most of them from Sub-Saharan countries (Niger, Egypt, Chad, Sudan, Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Somalia, Bangladesh, Syria, Eritrea, Senegal, Morocco, Ethiopia, Tunisia and Burkina Faso). In coordination with IOM, Niger has organized several charters to repatriate its nationals from Tripoli to Niamey. Although few unaccompanied children were amongst the returnees, their return was supported by the Ministry of women empowerment and child protection which partnered with IOM to ensure a safe return home.

A HOST TO ASYLUM SEEKERS RELOCATED FROM LIBYA

As of 17 September 2018, a total of 55,498 asylum seekers and refugees are registered with UNHCR in Libya. A total of 5,661 individuals have been identified by UNHCR and its partners to be currently in one of the accessible Libyan detention centres. Since the start of the evacuation operation in late 2017, a total of 1,536 persons (including unaccompanied children) have been evacuated to Niger.

NIGER AS A HOST TO OTHER ASYLUM SEEKERS

As of 25 August 2018, a total of 2,114 asylum seekers have arrived in Agadez town using their own means of transportation, according to the UNHCR. Out of these, 1,848 (87%) are from Sudan while 175 (8%) from Nigeria. The asylum seekers arrived at various times with a majority arriving in 2018 (81%). As of end of August 2018, there were a total of 528 children (378 boys and 150 girls) including 224 unaccompanied children, most of them from Sudan (Darfur region).

UNHCR has set up few transit facilities to host the children and their families and the State provided a new site to welcome approximately 500 asylum seekers and where support is being offered by various humanitarian organizations.
Migrant children and women, especially those without documentation, are vulnerable to trafficking, abuse and exploitation. In transit and destination countries, migrants and their families often find themselves victims of discrimination, poverty and social marginalization. UNICEF is working on the ground to ensure that programmes and policies in response to this crisis put the rights and needs of all children first.

WHAT UNICEF IS DOING?

UNICEF is working closely with UNHCR within the framework of the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) to provide care and support to children in transit while waiting for durable solutions. UNICEF is now supporting 44 children (since the beginning of ETM: 83 children) in three different transition and orientation centers (CTOS) managed by the Niamey Directorate of child Protection while the rest are supported by COOPI. It is evident that almost all children are severely tortured, and abused by notorious human traffickers while on transit in Sahara and in Libya.

UNICEF is working for an urgent psychosocial support while a durable solution worked out. In order to support the development of the children in transit, UNICEF is planning to implement an emergency education programme that takes into account the diverse education grades and ages of the children. This tailor-made package would be essential in keeping the children learning and will help them better cope with their extended stay in transit and prepare them for their future. As most children in the current caseload speak Tigrinya and Somali, while majority of the social workers or psychologists barely understands English, making complicated the language barrier. To provide quality care at the beginning of ETM, UNICEF had deployed a Tigrinya speaking child protection specialist to work directly with children in transit in the first three months of the programme. Technical and financial support continues to be given to the government partner for alternative care.

In addition, UNICEF is actively involved in the BID panel established in Niamey. Interviews for resettlement are ongoing.

To respond to the needs of children on the move, UNICEF in partnership with IOM, IRC, DRC is planning to implement a project aiming at providing information, child protection services, transit shelters, referral to children on the move along the transit route.

PROTECTING CHILDREN ON THE MOVE STARTS WITH BETTER DATA

In 2017, UNICEF conducted a study to better understand the causes of migration of women and children from Kantché District in Zinder Region to Algeria. The study found that this survival strategy has been successful in some cases, as families have been able to earn up to US$ 15 a day and to buy food, animals and motorcycles. However, this comes at a high cost for children who are deprived of schooling and beaten if they do not collect enough money. These children and women also run the risk of dying in the desert on the way to Algeria, as transporters often drop them off a distance before the border, to avoid being stopped by security forces, and they must walk for up to two days in the desert to reach Algeria. Since the end of 2013, 137 women and children are known to have died this way, but the actual number is probably higher.

The study on Kantché also identified some root causes for migration such as the lack of cultivable land because of the increased population pressure due to the high fertility rate (8.5 children per woman compared to 7.6 for the national average). Additional causes include change in the route due to the security situation in Northern Nigeria; visible improvements in the social and financial status of some returning migrants; the widely-practiced tradition of child guardianship where a child can be given to a foster family for an indefinite period of time; the lack of basic services such as education and health in most villages.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

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FAMILY TRACING AND REUNIFICATION

Nigerien unaccompanied children returning from Algeria also benefit from family tracing and reunification services through a partnership with the regional directorate of child protection in Agadez and Zinder. These partners provide temporary care while in transit, non-food items support, psychosocial support and post reunification follow up of children.
UNICEF NIGER ISSUE BRIEF

AGENDA FOR ACTION: UNICEF IS CALLING FOR A SIX-POINT PLAN TO KEEP REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN SAFE

| Press for action on the causes that uproot children from their homes | End the detention of refugee and migrant children by creating practical alternatives |
| Help uprooted children to stay in school and stay healthy | Combat xenophobia and discrimination |
| Keep families together and give children legal status | Protect uprooted children from exploitation and violence |

UNICEF is concerned over existing gaps that deprive children of their fundamental rights as agreed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. No matter where they are and regardless of their refugee status, all children have the right to be protected, to be safe, to keep learning and to receive the care and support needed to reach their full potential.

Stand with children uprooted. **A child is a child.** It’s time to act now!

| 6,779 Nigerien migrants repatriated from Algeria to Niger in 2017 | 679,897 migrants have been identified in Libya as of November 2017 | 55,498 refugees and asylum seekers registered in Libya |
| 1,855 of them are children | 54,392 of them are children | 1,536 have been evacuated to Niger through ETM |
Guided by the six UNICEF policy asks regarding children on the move, UNICEF Niger seeks additional support to help the Government of Niger provide timely, predictable and quality support to children transiting through or returning to Niger.

**MORE SUPPORT NEEDED**

**STRENGTHENING EXISTING CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS**

Strengthen existing national child protection systems to better respond to the needs of child migrants and child asylum seekers. The response to child migrants will be integrated into existing responses to vulnerable children which will enable migrant children to benefit from all the child protection interventions available in this context. This involves supporting the Ministry of Women empowerment and Child protection (MWECP) to integrate child migrants into existing responses to vulnerable children at national and community levels.

**PROVIDING SUPPORT AND CARE TO UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN**

Protection of child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence. This includes the provision of information, temporary care, as well as case management support (including the BID process). Provision of temporary care for unaccompanied child asylum seekers: UNICEF supports three reception centers, managed by the Nigerien government with current capacity of 70 children and expects further 1,000 unaccompanied children to arrive from Libya in 2018. The duration of stay in Niger exceeds the anticipated six months given the complexity of finding durable solutions for them. All unaccompanied child asylum seekers transiting through Niger will go through a best interest determination process as well as other case management processes which will require increased staff capacity to manage the increased caseload.

**CAPACITY BUILDING FOR ACTORS IN CONTACT WITH CHILD MIGRANTS**

Actors in frequent contact with child migrants such as police, border officers and social workers are equipped to better protect children on the move. UNICEF Niger in collaboration with UNHCR and IOM and other organizations involved in migrant programming will coordinate capacity building activities targeting government agencies in frequent contact with child migrants.

**ONE STOP SOCIAL WELFARE SHOPS**

“One Stop Social Welfare Shops” and their mobile teams are a new intervention in Niger. Inspired by the concept of Blue Dots set up by UNICEF and UNHCR in Europe. The Shops will be re-adapted to the national context to address the needs of child migrants transiting through Niger through provision of key information, direct support for children and pregnant women, referrals to other services including an option to return home.

UNICEF together with the government and other actors have a system in place for temporary care, tracing, family reunification and post reunification follow up for unaccompanied children returning to Niger. This system will be strengthened to support children returning from Algeria and Libya as well as child asylum seekers. The extended care for children in transit will increase the costs of provision of psychosocial support services and life skills training. Provision of Education program tailored for the children asylum seekers during their stay in Niger is crucial.

Children who are uprooted from their homes lose much more than the roof over their heads. Many lose family members, friends, safety and routines. Without any support, they risk losing their futures.

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For more information

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