

UN agency evacuates more than 1,000 refugees from Libya over past three months

More than 1,000 highly vulnerable refugees have been evacuated out of Libya since November by the UN refugee agency which is searching for “durable solutions” for these people in third countries.

The agency reported that the latest flights left the capital, Tripoli, this week, carrying 128 refugees to Niger on Tuesday while a second plane flew 150 others to Italy on Wednesday.

Overall, [1,084 refugees have been evacuated](#) in the three months since the start of the operation and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is calling on more countries to provide resettlement places for those still in Libya.

“These evacuations have provided a new chance at life for more than 1,000 refugees who were detained in Libya and suffered tremendously. By the end of 2018, we hope to evacuate thousands more,” said Vincent Cochetel, the agency’s Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean.

UNHCR said the 128 refugees evacuated to Niger are being accommodated in guesthouses in the capital, Niamey, thanks to cooperation from its partners and support from the Government.

They will receive assistance and psychosocial support pending resettlement or other durable solutions.

A total of 770 refugees have been evacuated to the country since November, including single mothers, families and unaccompanied or separated children.

The 150 refugees flown to Rome included children and women who UNHCR said had been held captive for lengthy periods.

The flight marked the second evacuation from Libya to Italy “and could not have happened without the strong commitment of the Italian authorities and the support of the Libyan Government,” according to a statement by the UN agency.

So far, a total of 312 refugees have been evacuated directly to the European country.

Alarming gaps in reliable data leave 28 million uprooted children unprotected – UN

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With *A call to action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data*, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed how crucial data are to understanding the patterns of global migration and developing policies to support vulnerable groups like children.

“Information gaps fundamentally undermine our ability to help children ,” said Laurence Chandy, UNICEF Director for the Division of Data, Research and Policy.

The report confirms that massive gaps in data covering refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and internally displaced populations are endangering millions of children on the move.

“Migrant children, particularly those who migrate alone, are often easy targets for those who would do them harm,” he continued, adding “We can’t keep children safe and provide them with lifesaving services, both in transit and at their destination, if we don’t know who they are, where they are or what they need.”

While an estimated 28 million children were living in forced displacement in 2016, the true figure is likely much higher.

In many countries, available national data do not include information on migrants’ and refugees’ age, sex and origin, or if they travel unaccompanied or with their families.

Moreover, nearly a quarter of countries and territories do not have age disaggregated data on migrants, including 43 per cent of countries and territories in Africa and just 56 per cent of the refugee population under UNHCR’s mandate has age information on record.

“Many refugee children have experienced or witnessed appalling violence and

suffering in their countries of origin and sometimes also during their flight in search of protection and security,” said Volker Türk, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

“They need and deserve care and protection but in order to provide this, we need data on their identity and needs. In no area is coordination on data and strengthening capacity more important than for children, especially the most vulnerable” he added.

The report underlines that differing criteria for age categories and for recoding data make disaggregation extremely challenging – particularly in estimating accurately how many children are on the move worldwide as well as those moving undocumented across borders, displaced or migrating internally, or left behind by migrant parents.

“We need reliable and better data on child migrants to protect them and guarantee their best interests,” stressed IOM Director General William Lacy Swing.

“Data disaggregation by age, sex and origin can inform policymakers of the real needs of child migrants. This will ensure that no child is left behind and that they are not exploited. All migrant children are entitled to care and protection regardless of their migratory status,” he affirmed.

The need for better data collection and analysis are key features of the related but distinct Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees currently being developed for adoption in 2018.

While there are ongoing efforts to strengthen data collection and analysis at both the global and country levels, far more needs to be done. If these gaps are not addressed, it will be impossible to implement and monitor the Compacts and the impact they could have for children on the move.

“We urge Member States to fill these gaps with reliable disaggregated data and to improve cooperation so that data is shared and comparable,” concluded Mr. Chandy.

UN says more than 10,000 civilians killed or injured in Afghanistan conflict last year

More than 10,000 civilians were killed or wounded in the Afghanistan conflict during 2017, a nine per cent drop over 2016, according to a United Nations report out Thursday which also revealed rising casualties caused by suicide

bombings and attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

“The chilling statistics in this report provide credible data about the war’s impact, but the figures alone cannot capture the appalling human suffering inflicted on ordinary people, especially women and children,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan.

A total of 10,453 civilian casualties – 3,438 people killed and 7,015 injured – were documented in the [2017 Annual Report](#) released Thursday by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

Although this figure represents a decrease of nine per cent compared with 2016, the report highlights the high number of casualties caused by suicide bombings and other attacks using IEDs.

“I am [particularly appalled](#) by the continued indiscriminate and unlawful use of IEDs such as suicide bombs and pressure-plate devices in civilian populated areas. This is shameful,” said Mr. Yamamoto, who also heads UNAMA.

The second leading cause of civilian casualties in 2017 was ground engagements between anti-government elements and pro-government forces, although there was a decrease of 19 per cent from the record levels seen in 2016.

The report attributes close to two-thirds or 65 per cent of all casualties to anti-government elements: 42 per cent to the Taliban, 10 per cent to Da’esh/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP), and 13 per cent to undetermined and other anti-government elements.

Pro-Government forces caused a fifth of civilian casualties: 16 per cent were attributed to the Afghan national security forces, two per cent to international military forces, one per cent each to pro-Government armed groups and undetermined pro-Government forces.

Unattributed cross-fire during ground engagements between anti-government elements and pro-government forces caused 11 per cent of civilian casualties.

Women and children remained heavily affected by conflict-related violence. UNAMA documented that 359 women were killed, up five per cent, and 865 injured in 2017. Child casualties – 861 killed and 2,318 injured – decreased by 10 per cent compared with 2016.

“Afghan civilians have been killed going about their daily lives – travelling on a bus, praying in a mosque, simply walking past a building that was targeted,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein.

“Such attacks are prohibited under international humanitarian law and are likely, in most cases, to constitute war crimes. The perpetrators must be identified and held accountable,” he added.

The report attributes 1,000 civilian casualties – 399 deaths and 601 injured

– and the abduction of 119 civilians to Da’esh/ISIL-KP.

“The group mainly targeted civilians in 2017 but also conducted indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against security forces in civilian areas,” the report states.

Among its recommendations, the report urges parties to the conflict to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian installations. It calls on anti-government elements to cease the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian objects and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of all IEDs.

[New guidelines on global care standards during childbirth issued by UN health agency](#)

The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) has issued new guidelines on global care standards throughout labour and immediately after childbirth aimed at reducing the use of needless and potentially harmful routine clinical and medical interventions.

“We want women to give birth in a safe environment with skilled birth attendants in well-equipped facilities. However, the increasing medicalization of normal childbirth processes are undermining a woman’s own capability to give birth and negatively impacting her birth experience,” [said](#) Princess Nothemba Simelela, the Assistant Director-General at the UN World Health Organization (WHO) for Family, Women, Children and Adolescents.

Worldwide, an estimated 140 million births take place every year and most of these occur without complications for women and their babies.

However, according to WHO, over the past 20 years, health practitioners have increased the use of interventions that were previously only used to avoid risks or treat complications, such as oxytocin infusion to speed up labour or caesarean sections. Studies show that a substantial proportion of healthy pregnant women undergo at least one clinical intervention during labour and birth.

“If labour is progressing normally, and the woman and her baby are in good condition, they do not need to receive additional interventions to accelerate labour,” added Dr. Simelela.

Based on 56 evidence-based recommendations, the new [guidelines](#) include having a companion of choice during labour and childbirth; ensuring respectful care

and good communication between women and health providers; maintaining privacy and confidentiality; and allowing women to make decisions about their pain management, labour and birth positions and natural urge to push, among others.

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Every labour is unique and progresses at different rates

Recognizing that every labour and childbirth is unique and that the duration of the active first stage of labour varies from one woman to another, the guidelines state that the previous benchmark for cervical dilation rate at 1 cm/hr during the active first stage of labour (as assessed by a partograph or chart used to document the course of a normal labour) may be “unrealistic” for some women and is inaccurate in identifying women at risk of adverse birth outcomes.

The guidelines emphasize that a slower cervical dilation rate alone should not be a routine indication for intervention to accelerate labour or expedite birth.

Furthermore, while most women want a natural labour and birth, they also acknowledge that birth can be an unpredictable and risky event and that close monitoring and sometimes medical interventions may be necessary.

When a medical intervention is wanted or needed, “the inclusion of women in making decisions about the care they receive is important to ensure that they meet their goal of a positive childbirth experience,” said Ian Askew, the head of WHO Department of Reproductive Health and Research.

High quality and dignified care for all women

The UN agency also noted that with more women give birth in health facilities with skilled health professionals and timely referrals, they deserve better quality of care.

Estimates show that about 830 women die from pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications around the world every day – the majority of which can be prevented with high-quality care.

Additionally, disrespectful and non-dignified care is prevalent in many health facilities, violating human rights and preventing women from accessing care services during childbirth. In many parts of the world, the health provider controls the birthing process, further exposing healthy pregnant women to unnecessary medical interventions that interfere with the natural childbirth process.

“Achieving the best possible physical, emotional, and psychological outcomes

for the woman and her baby requires a model of care in which health systems empower all women to access care that focuses on the mother and child,” underscored WHO.

[Guinea-Bissau: Political crisis requires continued UN presence, Security Council told](#)

The United Nations will need to focus its efforts on supporting Guinea-Bissau’s national leaders in their efforts to appoint an acceptable Prime Minister, establish an inclusive Government, organize and conduct timely elections, and implement the priority reforms, a UN envoy for the West African country said Wednesday.

“After several years of long-term investment in the stability of Guinea-Bissau, it is time to consolidate and reap the dividends of our concerted efforts. It is vital that we accompany this process to its completion,” Modibo Ibrahim Touré, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Guinea-Bissau told the Security Council.

Mr. Touré stressed the importance for the Council to continue to reaffirm the centrality of the Conakry Agreement, reiterating its support to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in its mediation efforts.

The Conakry Agreement of 14 October 2016 provides for, among other things, the appointment of a consensual Prime Minister.

According to the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), Guinea-Bissau has been plagued by [chronic political instability](#) since gaining independence in 1974.

The DPA provides support and oversight to the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office for Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), a special political mission first established in 1999 following a two-year civil war in the country. Since mid-2016, the Mission is headed by Mr. Touré.

The main priorities of UNIOGBIS are to support efforts to consolidate constitutional order, further political dialogue and national reconciliation, encourage security sector reform, and promote respect for human rights and the rule of law.

On political developments, Mr. Touré said President Jose Mario Vaz dismissed former Prime Minister Umaro Sissoco Embaló and replaced him with Artur Silva.

“The absence of a functioning and stable Government for more than three years has limited the ability of UNIOGBIS to effectively and sustainably implement some of its mandated tasks,” said Mr.Touré.

Until the completion of the electoral cycle in 2019, Guinea-Bissau remains a country that requires a dedicated UN presence to prevent a further deterioration in the political and security situation at the national level and to avoid any negative spill-over to its neighbours and creating a fertile environment for trafficking to thrive, he noted.

“It will be important for the United Nations to remain engaged in peacebuilding efforts in the country while supporting ECOWAS intervention to resolve the political crisis for at least one more year,” he said.

Lastly, throughout the past year, the presence of ECOWAS Mission in Guinea Bissau has consistently acted as a deterrent to unauthorized military action and a stabilizing factor in the country, he said, calling on the Council and international donors to support the continued presence of ECOMIB through to the holding of a presidential election in 2019, including by advocating for the renewal of its mandate and the provision of the financial support needed to maintain its deployment.