



**INTRODUCTION** The COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted global mobility in the form of reduced travel, border closures and travel restrictions and bans. In West & Central Africa (WCA), where measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 have been imposed, mobile population are heavily affected by the coronavirus crisis.

This report presents, for the month of June 2020, key trends and events relating to mobility in the WCA region; details the status of Points of Entry (PoE) and extent of travel restriction measures; presents preventive and mitigating measures in place; and explores the impact of travel restriction measures on mobile populations, including migrants and forcibly displaced populations.

### KEY TRENDS

- Regional migratory flows increased by 29 per cent between May and June 2020.
- Cross-boundary movements, notably the return of nationals and the bypassing of official PoE, continue despite border closures
- The closure of border has left 11,000 migrants currently stranded
- 7,000 transhumant herders are stranded at borders.
- 1,300 migrants are waiting at IOM transit centers and unable to return to their home country.
- Over 20,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) displaced by the crisis in North West and South West Cameroon returned to their location of origin.
- The number of forced returns from Algeria and Libya to Chad, Niger and Mali grew.

## REGIONAL MOBILITY

### MIGRATION FLOWS

The COVID-19 epidemic has upended regional mobility in West & Central Africa. Restrictions on cross-boundary mobility and border closures as well as reduced travel linked to truncated business and economic opportunities and fear of the virus, have heavily impacted international mobility throughout the region.

IOM, through its Flow Monitoring activities, conducted at key transit points across the region, observed a striking **drop in flows in March**; this coincides with the period during which the number of COVID-19 cases grew and countries in the region started imposing travel bans and enacting border closure measures. Subsequently, the number of travellers observed at transit points **grew substantially from April to June**. Between April and May 2020, recorded flows jumped by 65 per cent, while flows **increased by 29 per cent between May and June 2020**. After witnessing a continuous rise between April and June, migratory flows stabilized in the second half of the month of June.

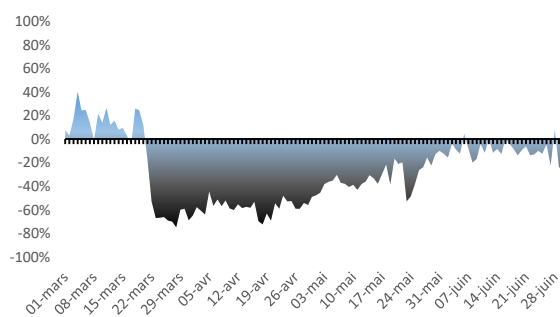
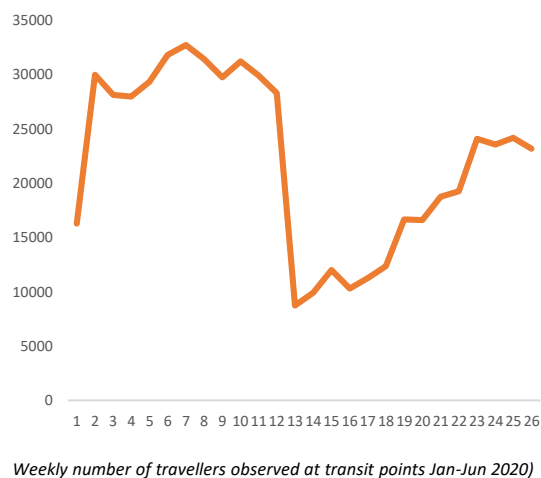
The volume of flows observed was significantly smaller in 2020 than in 2019, pointing to the bearing of the COVID-19 crisis on regional mobility: **regional transboundary flows in June 2020 were six per cent smaller than observed flows over the same period in 2019**, while at the height of the crisis, flow volume was up to 70 per cent lower in 2020 than in 2019.

↓ -6%

Regional Migration Flows, 2019 (Jun)-2020 (Jun)

↑ +29%

Regional Migration Flows (May-Jun 2020)





## MOBILITY RESTRICTION MEASURES

As of June 2020, international borders continued to remain closed throughout West and Central Africa. Nevertheless, as mobility restrictions increasingly take a toll on national economies and spawn growing hardship for populations, and despite growing infection rates, countries throughout the region continued the process of easing restrictions and reopening internal mobility. Thus, in the Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, Gabon, Senegal, the interdiction to travel between districts was lifted. In addition, school classes and worship services partially resumed and shops and restaurants reopened in several countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Ghana, Cameroon, Senegal.

In other countries, measures and restrictions have been kept in place and in some instance have been extended or reinforced. In Liberia, for instance, the nightly curfew was strengthened and the state of emergency extended. Likewise, in Guinea, the state of emergency was extended and a mandatory quarantine for all incoming travellers was imposed. In Togo, a three-month state of emergency was declared and reinforced sanitary measures were announced. More worrisome, the state of emergency was extended in The Gambia, albeit through executive powers and without the approval of the National Assembly.



In terms of air travel, domestic flights resumed in most of the countries. Meanwhile, in every country in the region, the reopening of air borders and international airports, initially planned for June 2020, were delayed or postponed. Moreover, humanitarian flights were banned in Chad, Mauritania and Niger.

*Point of Entry (PoE) personnel conduct passenger screening at Tombo Wharf a major trade and transport hub in Freetown, Sierra Leone © IOM*

## BORDER ASSESSMENTS — POINTS OF ENTRY

IOM has developed a global mobility database mapping the status of different Points of Entry (PoE), including airports, land border crossing points, blue border crossing points (sea, river or lake), internal transit points and areas of interest. For each point of entry, data is collected on the type of restriction, measured applied and the timeframe, as well as the population category that may be affected by the restrictive measures.

Across the West & Central Africa region, **446 Points of Entry** were identified, out of which 359 Land Border Points (80%), 44 Blue Border Points (10%) and 43 Airports (10%). In addition, IOM identified **98 Internal Transit Points (ITPs)**. The vast majority of PoE (94%) were **official PoE**, while 6 per cent were **non-official**.

Out of the 544 PoE and ITPs for which information on the operational status is available, close to half (266, or 49%) were **closed for both entry and exit**. 109 points, or 20 per cent, on the other hand were **open for both entry and exit**. Meanwhile, 68 PoE, or 13 per cent were closed but **open to returning nationals** only while 55 PoE (10%) were **open to commercial traffic** and goods transportation.

**544**  
**POINTS OF ENTRY**  
**AND INTERNAL TRANSIT**  
**POINTS** ASSESSED BY IOM IN WEST  
 AND CENTRAL AFRICA

**21% OPEN**  
**28% PARTIALLY OPEN**  
**51% CLOSED**

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**94% OFFICIAL**  
**6% NON-OFFICIAL**



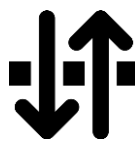


## CONTINUED CROSS-BOUNDARY MOVEMENTS



**500+**

*Return of nationals to home countries*



**8,000+**

*Cross-border movements observed*

Despite the closure of borders and restrictions in mobility enacted throughout the region, cross-boundary continued to be observed in the region throughout the month of June. Indeed, cross-boundary travel increased between May and June 2020: of the 11 Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) located along international borders, nine FMPs saw increases in flows, ranging from hikes of 7 per cent (Dan Issa, Niger) to 115 per cent (Heremakono, Mali).

Two principal factors drive cross-boundary flows despite border closures. Firstly, travellers cross from one country to the next by bypassing official PoE, often with the help of smugglers. Notably, in Burkina Faso, an average of 1,800 travellers were observed crossing the border between Burkina Faso and neighbouring countries by circumventing official Points of Entry.

Secondly, several countries in the region allows the return of nationals and foreign residents as an exception to restrictions in mobility in place at borders. This, alongside loss of economic opportunities and employment engendered by the crisis, has led many migrants to return to their home countries. Significant numbers of Burkinabe nationals were thus observed at FMPs returning to Burkina Faso from neighbouring countries. In addition, returns from Algeria and Libya to Mali, Niger and Chad have grown since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, as migrants travel back to their home countries. Deportations from Libya to Chad, in particular, increased by xx% between May and June 2020.



*An IOM staff member distributes equipment for the detection of COVID-19 symptoms in Nouakchott, Mauritania © IOM*





## MOBILE POPULATIONS

### STRANDED MIGRANTS



11,000

Stranded migrants (excluding migrants in transit centres)



7,000

Stranded transhumant herders



500

Migrants in quarantine

Measures restricting mobility throughout West & Central Africa have left at least **11,000 migrants currently stranded** throughout the region. Indeed, migrants attempting to **cross international borders** are prevented from doing so due to border closures, while many migrants seeking to **return home** are unable to do so, with no . This number is likely to be underrepresented.

Stranded migrants are likely to present **heightened vulnerabilities** and to live in **precarious conditions**. They are also at greater risk of being impacted by the socioeconomic effects of the crisis more severely, of facing discrimination in access to housing and basic services and of falling prey to smugglers and traffickers.

A notable consequence of the closure of borders and restrictions of mobility is the stranding of transhuman herders at international borders. Transhumant herders travel seasonally, often across borders, in search of water and pasture for their cattle, and the closure of borders threatens their way of life and generating tensions with local communities. In Mauritania, an estimated 7,000 transhumant herders are currently blocked along the borders with Mali and Senegal.

In addition to migrants being stranded, IOM has identified over **500 migrants currently in quarantine** (350 in Niger and 150 in Chad) where they have been placed following their arrival as a preventive measure.

### MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT CENTRES & ASSISTED RETURN



2,200

Assisted returns

IOM assists migrants who wish to go home but lack the means to do so to return on a voluntary basis, safely and in dignity to their countries of origin. Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Program has assisted with the return of **over 2,200 migrants** in West & Central Africa, from other countries in the region (Burkina Faso, Niger) as well as other regions (Lebanon, Ethiopia).



1,300

Migrants in transit centres

Restrictions on mobility and border closures imposed by governments throughout the region have severely hampered AVRR activities. Close to **1,300 migrants are currently waiting in IOM Transit Centres**, stranded and unable to go home. The majority (882) were in Niger, followed by Mali (84), Burkina Faso (60) and Chad (36) As numbers grow and mobility restrictions prevent IOM from assisting in the voluntary return of migrants, many Transit Centres become overcrowded, exacerbating tensions and psychological stress and making it more difficult to enforce social distancing and implement preventive measures.





## INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

 **6.5 M**  
*Internally Displaced Persons*


 **10**  
*COVID-19 cases in displacement camps*

West & Central Africa hosts a large internally displaced population: over 8 million individuals are estimated to have been displaced within the borders of their country of origin. Displaced populations often live in overcrowded environments where practicing social distancing is near impossible, and with little access to WASH facilities or health services, and are thus particularly vulnerable.

As of 30 June 2020, there were ten confirmed COVID-19 case amongst displaced populations, including 2 in Nigeria and 8 in Mali. However, it is likely that COVID-19 cases amongst IDPs is largely under-reported, as testing capacities in displacement sites are limited and IDPs are unlikely to report. Moreover, large number of cases were identified in areas with high


concentrations of displaced populations, including in Nigeria’s Borno State and Chad’s Lac Province, raising the possibility of future infection.

In addition, restrictions and measures imposed by countries, territories and areas as a response to the pandemic are directly impacting the daily lives and circumstances of IDPs and host communities. Livelihoods are being interrupted and access to healthcare, where it is available, remains limited. Many communities hosting internally displaced populations lack adequate investment into health, water and sanitation facilities, in addition to the issues of overcrowding, poor shelter, scarce resources and limited access to reliable information

 In **60%** of locations in Chad and Cameroon, the majority of IDPs are aware of the COVID pandemic

The prevalent rate of infection in areas hosting displaced populations and the risks which the COVID-19 epidemic pose to displaced populations prompted IOM to adapt the Displacement Tracking Matrix’s Mobility Tracking (MT9 methodology, which is implemented in sited and locations hosting IDPs, in order to collect information on displaced populations’ knowledge of the epidemic and on preventive measures put in place at displacement sites. In June 2020, MT exercises were conducted in Chad and Cameroon; they are also being rolled out in Mali and Nigeria.

Results from assessments in Chad and Cameroon show that in more than a third of assessed locations (36%), every IDP was aware of the COVID-19 epidemic. In 60 per cent of locations, the majority (at least 50%) of IDPs had some awareness of the

 Measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 were taken in **23%** of locations

situation. However, in 20 per cent of locations, either no IDP or only a few IDPs were aware of the pandemic. In Chad, 55 per cent of IDPs indicated being very concerned while 31 per cent were somewhat concerned and 14 per cent did not feel concerned about the situation.

Measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 were taken in 23 per cent of assessed sites. The primary measures taken were sensitization and awareness raising (in 66% of locations); installation of hand washing stations with water and soap (27%); restrictions in mobility within or to and from the displacement site (18%); and isolation of suspect cases (6%). It should be noted that, in most assessed locations in Cameroon (42%), only a few IDPs had access to soap and water (in 17% of location, no IDP had access, while in 25% of locations, the majority has access).