



# A REGION ON THE MOVE

MOBILITY TRENDS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

JANUARY — DECEMBER 2020



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community: to assist in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration management; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

The maps included in this document are for illustration purposes only. The depiction and use of boundaries, geographic names and related data shown on maps and included in this report are not warranted to be error free nor do they imply judgment on the legal status of any territory, or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries by IOM.

PUBLISHER

International Organization for Migration,  
Regional Office for West and Central Africa  
Dakar, Senegal

© 2021 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Cover Picture: ©IOM/Amanda Nero

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  

---

The UN Migration Agency

# A REGION ON THE MOVE

MOBILITY TRENDS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

JANUARY — DECEMBER 2020

# FOREWORD

The West and Central Africa region is a vast and diverse socioeconomic and geopolitical expanse beset by a myriad of challenges yet is also rich in opportunity. Migration is a defining characteristic of this landscape, and as such, has immense potential in contributing to the well-being of people and societies across the region. Notwithstanding these benefits, the promise of well-managed migration and increased mobility within the region cannot be taken for granted. Countries face a range of structural and unforeseen that continually threaten to undermine stability, security and development, and can adversely affect migration.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. The Regional Office for West and Central Africa 2020-2024 strategy responds to current and emerging challenges, positioning the Organization to better serve Member States and migrant populations throughout all stages of their journey across the West and Central Africa region and beyond<sup>1</sup>. This regional strategy particularly reflects the essential role that IOM plays, serving as a key source of advice on migration program and policy, research, data and practice. This role is further emphasized in the IOM Migration Data Strategy<sup>2</sup> that highlights the role of the organization in mobilizing the international community to build a stronger evidence base on migration and promote its systematic use to guide policy and action.

This report effectively gathers, in one place, a vast amount of primary data collected by IOM, partners (UNDESA, UNHCR, Mixed Migration Center, etc.) and academics. It contributes to IOM Migration Data Strategy by effectively leveraging its role as a key contributor in the international community's efforts to broaden and strengthen the evidence base on the movement of people at the regional level.



**Christopher Gascon**

IOM West and Central Africa Regional Director  
International Organization for Migration

<sup>1</sup> IOM, [West and Central Africa – Regional Strategy 2020-2024](#), 2020.

<sup>2</sup> IOM, [IOM Migration Data Strategy](#), 2021.

# CONTENT

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>HIGHLIGHTS</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>Page 13</b>
<b>FORCED DISPLACEMENT</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
IMPACT OF COVID-19	Page 17
REGIONAL CRISES	Page 21
LAKE CHAD BASIN CRISIS	Page 23
CENTRAL SAHEL / LIPTAKO GOURMA	Page 27
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	Page 30
NIGERIA (NORTH WEST/NORTH CENTRAL)	Page 34
CAMEROON (NORTH WEST/SOUTH WEST)	Page 37
<b>MIGRATION</b>	<b>Page 39</b>
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRATION FLOWS	Page 40
<b>INTRA-REGIONAL MIGRATION</b>	Page 54
INTER-REGIONAL MIGRATION	Page 67
<b>ANNEXES</b>	<b>Page 81</b>
DEFINITION	Page 82
LIST OF ACRONYMS	Page 84
LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES, MAPS	Page 85
METHODOLOGIES	Page 87

# HIGHLIGHTS

Mobility is a key characteristic of West and Central Africa, embedded in its historical, social, economic, cultural and political fabric. Overwhelmingly intraregional, mobility also involves close links with other regions, spurred by West and Central Africa's strategic location and a rich history of extra regional exchange and trade. Regional migration in the region is triggered by a combination of factors, including socio-economic drivers and seasonal and livelihood factors; persistent insecurity and conflict; climate variability and deteriorating environmental conditions; and public health emergencies. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally shaped mobility in the region, as the sanitary situation, mobility restrictions and other economic measures adopted by states heavily impacted population movements.

## 1. COVID-19 IMPACTS ON MOBILITY

### Forced displacement and displaced populations

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the risks and vulnerabilities faced by displaced populations living in countries with some of the weakest health systems in the world. Mobility restrictions and other measures imposed by countries to limit the spread of the coronavirus, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, unsanitary conditions in which displaced populations may live, promiscuity in displacement camps and limited access to services have all contributed to increasing the vulnerable situations of IDPs.

Assessments conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicated that lockdowns, mobility restrictions, closures of businesses and school shutdowns led to substantial losses in employment and incomes of IDPs and had negative impacts on IDPs' access to food, nutrition, housing and education. The assessments found that in Nigeria's North East and Cameroon's Far North, 56 per cent of sites hosting IDPs experienced disruptions in basic services, including health services, education, food and nutrition support, water delivery and protection services as a result of lockdowns, mobility restrictions and limited access to displacement sites.

Finally, the crisis impeded humanitarian response and assistance and disrupted the humanitarian supply chain. Mobility restrictions imposed by governments have curtailed humanitarian access, restricted the movement of lifesaving supplies and made it more challenging for response actors to reach affected communities.

### Migration flows and migrant populations

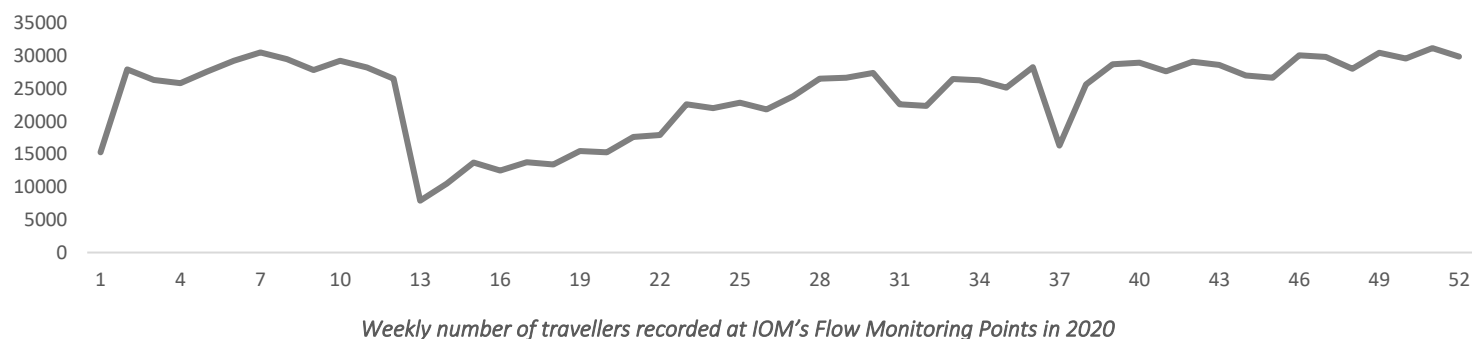
The ways and the extent to which the COVID-19 crisis has been impacting mobility in the region is yet to be fully understood. Nevertheless, data collected by IOM at key transit points throughout the region has showed that regional flows dropped by 40 per cent from January to May 2020,



**The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the risks and vulnerabilities faced by displaced populations**

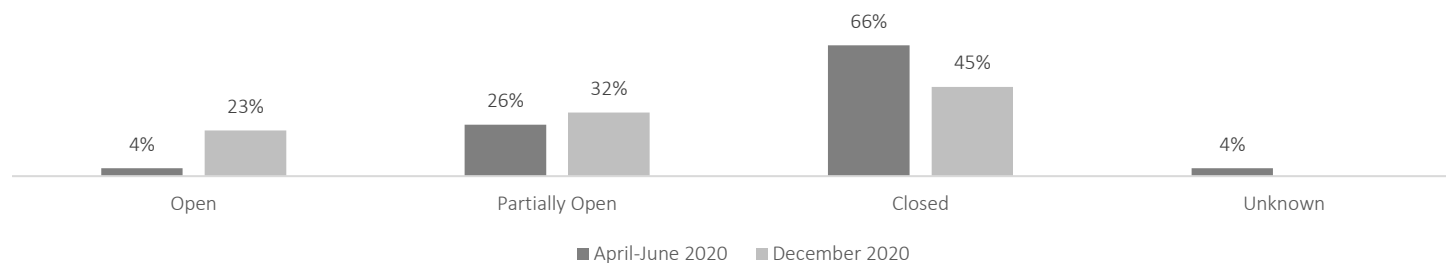
## HIGHLIGHTS

while flows were 50 per cent lower in April and 36 per cent lower in May when compared to the same months in 2019. Migration flows quickly bounced back, reaching levels higher than the same period in 2019 during the last quarter of 2020.



**Regional flows dropped by 40 per cent between January and May 2020 as a result of COVID-19 related border closures and mobility restrictions**

Similarly to countries around the world, governments in West and Central Africa adopted measures to limit the spread of the virus, including the closure of maritime, air and land borders; restrictions on internal mobility; curfews, lockdowns and quarantining of cities or region; states of emergencies; mandatory isolation of travellers; restrictions on social, educational, and economic activities. Assessments conducted between April and June 2020 found that 66 per cent of Points of Entry (PoEs) evaluated throughout the West and Central Africa region were completely shut off to all traffic, while 26 per cent were partially open, only allowing the passage of freight transport, returning nationals or humanitarian flights and convoys. Only 4 per cent of PoEs were fully open to travellers (4% unknown status). By December, 45 per cent of PoEs were still closed.



*Operational status of Points of Entry in West and Central Africa in April-June 2020 and December 2020*

This situation generated an estimated 50,000 migrants left stranded region-wide, including 3,000 migrants blocked in Transit Centres amidst the slowdown of IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme. As a result, many migrants searched for new ways to cross borders while avoiding control and detection, a situation which drove a greater proportion of continuing movements into irregularity and presumably led to an increase in informal border checks and dishonest practices; the development of new smuggling networks; and the use of

## HIGHLIGHTS

unofficial PoE to cross borders. Smugglers also changed their routes in response to border closures, which might partly explain the revival of the West African Atlantic Route.

The pandemic additionally had severe consequences on migrants' lives and livelihoods: 47 per cent of migrants interviewed by IOM indicated having faced challenges because of the COVID-19 crisis. The economic fallout of the crisis led to loss of income; the inability to send and receive remittances; restricted access to basic services and goods (51%, 39% and 38% of migrants reported not being able to afford food, education fees, or housing, respectively); promiscuity and overcrowding in often unhygienic conditions; heightened medical risks; increased risks of exploitation, abuse and discrimination; decreased agricultural productivity; disrupted supply chains; and limited job prospects.

Adding to this, pre-existing vulnerabilities, including fear of deportation and detention; limited entitlement to services; lack of access to facilities; and limited awareness of rights were exacerbated by the crisis, further restricting migrants' access to services and support. Meanwhile, support systems and assistance programmes were heavily impacted by mobility restrictions and reallocation of resources, limiting their ability to provide assistance to migrants.

Finally, the COVID-19 crisis could lead to future emigration, as the crisis's economic impact pushes more people into poverty, forcing them to migrate in search of economic and livelihood opportunities.

## 2. FORCED DISPLACEMENT

The West and Central Africa region was home to 7.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 1.3 million refugees and asylum-seekers as of December 2020, mainly generated by five sub-regional situations:

### Lake Chad Basin

As of December 2020, the Lake Chad Basin (Far North Cameroon, Chad's Lac Province, Eastern Niger and North East Nigeria) hosted an estimated 5 million affected individuals made up of Internally Displaced Persons (2,910,979), Refugees (258,591, both in- and out-of-camp) and Returnees (1,740,327 Former IDPs and 221,628 Returnees from abroad).

In 2019 and 2020, the crisis affecting the Lake Chad Basin worsened markedly, after witnessing a relatively stabilization between 2016 and 2018. Volatile security conditions, frequent attacks on security forces, civilians and humanitarian workers and intensifying conflict, abuses and other human rights violations generated significant displacement of populations. Over the course of the year 2020, the total affected population in the Lake Chad Basin Crisis (LCBC) grew by 1 per cent, from 4,669,100 to 5,131,525 individuals. In particular, close to 113,000 additional persons were internally displaced between January and December 2020 (an increase of 11% in the number of IDPs).



**50,000 migrants were left stranded due to mobility restriction measures adopted by countries in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**



**7.5 million internally displaced persons reside in the West and Central Africa region**



COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	SOURCE	TREND 2019
CAMEROON	321,886	DTM	+8%
CHAD	336,124	DTM	+98%
NIGER	102,726	GOV OF NIGER	-8%
NIGERIA	2,150,243	DTM	+6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,910,979</b>		<b>+11%</b>

*Number of IDPs in the Lake Chad Basin, as of December 2020*

### Central Sahel and Liptako Gourma

As of December 2020, an estimated 2,388,742 individuals, including 1,546,179 IDPs, 175,835 Refugees and 666,728 Returnees (including 582,079 former IDP Returnees and 84,649 Returnees from abroad), were recorded in Central Sahel, and in particular the Liptako Gourma region, the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Western Niger. The crisis affecting Central Sahel escalated sharply in 2020, the result of the proliferation of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG) and militias, inter- and intra- communal conflicts, and the multiplication of human rights abuses in the region: the number of affected individuals represents a 47 per cent increase from the number of affected individuals a year earlier (1,619,863-). The number of IDPs grew by 86 per cent (up from 831,706), in large part driven by the deterioration of the situation in Burkina Faso. Close to 70 per cent of IDPs are found in Burkina Faso, showcasing the fact that the country has become the epicenter of the crisis over the past year.

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	SOURCE	TREND 2019
BURKINA FASO	1,074,993	CONASUR	+97%
MALI	332,957	DTM	+60
NIGER	138,229	GOV OF NIGER	+77%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,546,179</b>		<b>+86%</b>

*Number of IDPs in Central Sahel, as of December 2020*

### Central African Republic

A total of 630,924 internally displaced, in addition to 634,539 Refugees, 843,352 Former IDP Returnees and 328,841 Returnees from abroad were recorded in the Central African Republic (CAR) as of December 2020. Although the displacement context calmed down significantly in 2020, as activities by rebel groups declined, tensions between communities eased and armed violence subsided, sporadic attacks and conflicts nevertheless continued, generating displacements of populations. In addition, floods were a major factor of displacement in 2020. At the end of the year, the country saw an unparalleled wave of violence in the context of the Presidential and legislative elections which were held on 27 December 2020. The escalation of violence, which has pitted government and MINUSCA forces against a coalition of rebel forces displaced over

**The Lake Chad Basin  
hosts 3 million IDPs**

**The Central  
Sahel/Liptako Gourma  
hosts 1.5 million IDPs**

**The Central African  
Republic hosts 630,000  
IDPs**

## HIGHLIGHTS

240,000 individuals within CAR, while over 105,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) hosting 90 per cent of new refugees.

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	SOURCE	TREND 2019
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	630,924	CMP	-10%

*Number of IDPs in the Central African Republic, as of December 2020*

### North West/North Central Nigeria

The crisis in Nigeria's North West and North Central Zones stabilized in 2020. As of 31 December 2020, the crisis affecting the two regions affected a total of 824,526 individuals, including 747,526 IDPs (728,688 IDPs in Nigeria's North West and North Central Zones as well as 18,838 IDPs in Niger's Maradi Region) and 824,526 Refugees. While this represents an important increase of 29 per cent in the number of IDPs compared to the previous round conducted in December 2019 (578,119), this growth should be attributed to the growth in geographic coverage of DTM assessments, which increased from 160 Local Government Areas (LGAs) to 172 LGAs.

The crisis in the Middle Belt has also provoked the displacement of significant numbers of people to neighbouring Niger, with 77,000 Nigerian Refugees fleeing to Niger's Maradi Region in 2020, including 23,000 in April 2020 alone. Furthermore, the violence has, since May 2019, spilled over into Niger, where 18,636 individuals were internally displaced in the Maradi Region.

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	SOURCE	TREND 2019
NIGERIA	728,688	DTM	+26%
NIGER	18,636	GOV OF NIGER	+62%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>747,324</b>		<b>+29%</b>

*Number of IDPs in Nigeria's North West/North Central Zones and Niger's Maradi Region, as of December 2020*

### North West/South West Cameroon

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of 31 December 2020, a total of 1,135,660 individuals, including 711,056 IDPs, 342,628 Former IDP Returnees, 18,279 Returnees from abroad and 63,697 Refugees in Nigeria, were affected by the crisis in Cameroon's Anglophone Regions (North West and North South Regions). Over the course of the year, the number of IDPs grew by 33 per cent (up from 536,107 IDPs in December 2019). The number of Returnees, meanwhile, grew at a faster pace, witnessing a growth of 52 per cent during the year (up from 237,349). This growth is at least partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic: as the government adopted preventive measures to limit the spread of the virus, including the shutdown of businesses and school closures, large numbers of IDPs and Refugees returned to their location of origin from displacement locations. It is yet uncertain whether these returns will be durable in time.

**750,000 IDPs are displaced by the crisis in North West/North Central Nigeria**

**710,000 IDPs are displaced by the crisis in North West/South West Cameroon**

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	SOURCE	TREND 2019
CAMEROON	711,065	OCHA	-33%

*Number of IDPs displaced by Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis (North West/South West Regions), as of December 2020*

### 3. MIXED MIGRATION TRENDS

In 2020, migration flows trends in West and Central Africa were characterized by three formative events: an increase in intraregional mobility within the region (prior and following restrictions of mobility during the COVID-19 crisis); a decrease in irregular migrant arrivals in Europe; and the large volume of irregular migration movements to the Canary Islands.

#### Intraregional mobility

Although migration flows were deeply affected by COVID-19, they returned to pre-COVID levels in mid-2020, and in some locations saw a large increase when compared to 2019. Indeed, data collected by IOM before the crisis (January-February 2020) and in the second half of the year seem to indicate that, despite the COVID-19 crisis, flows were significantly higher in 2020 than in 2019: in the periods January-February 2020, migration flows were on average 26 per cent larger in 2020 than in 2019 while in October-December migrations flows were on average 39 per cent larger in 2020 than in 2019.

#### Irregular migrant arrivals to Europe

The total number of irregular arrivals to Europe dropped in 2020, when compared to 2019. In 2019, 129,596 irregular migrants arrived in Europe (both by land and by sea) and 96,076 in 2020, reflecting a 26 per cent decrease in arrivals to Europe. The ranking of the countries of arrival also witnessed stark shifts in 2020. While Greece (71,386) was the main country through which irregular migrants reached Europe in 2019, it was only the third country of arrival in 2020 (14,785), behind Spain (41,861) and Italy (34,154). The number of arrivals to Greece saw a 78 per cent drop between 2019 and 2020, while arrivals to Italy doubled, and arrivals to Spain grew by 18 per cent over the same period.

COUNTRY	2019	2020	+/-
GREECE	71,386	14,785	-78%
ITALY	11,471	34,154	+198%
SPAIN	35,513	41,861	+29%
OTHER	11,226	5,276	-53%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>129,596</b>	<b>96,076</b>	<b>-26%</b>

*Irregular migrant arrivals in Europe in 2019 and 2020*

**In the third quarter of 2020, migration flows in West and Central Africa were 39% higher than in 2019**

**The total number of irregular migrant arrivals to Europe dropped by 26% between 2019 and 2020**

## HIGHLIGHTS

The proportion and number of West and Central African nationals among arrivals also dropped in 2020, when compared to 2019. In 2019, 22,851 West and Central African nationals arrived in Europe, representing 18 per cent of all arrivals, against 12,174 in 2020 (13%). Mobility restrictions imposed by countries might explain this drop. It should also be noted that Spain has not yet published nationalities of arrivals for the October-December 2020 period which is likely to increase the total 2020 figure.

COUNTRY	2019 (% proportion of WCA arrivals by country)	2020 (% proportion of WCA arrivals by country)
GREECE	3,372 (5%)	834 (9%)
ITALY	2,592 (58%)	5,322 (16%)
SPAIN	14,027 (43%)	5,473 (14%) (October-December 2020 data missing)
OTHER	2,860 (25%)	545 (10%)
TOTAL	22,851 (18%)	12,174 (13%)

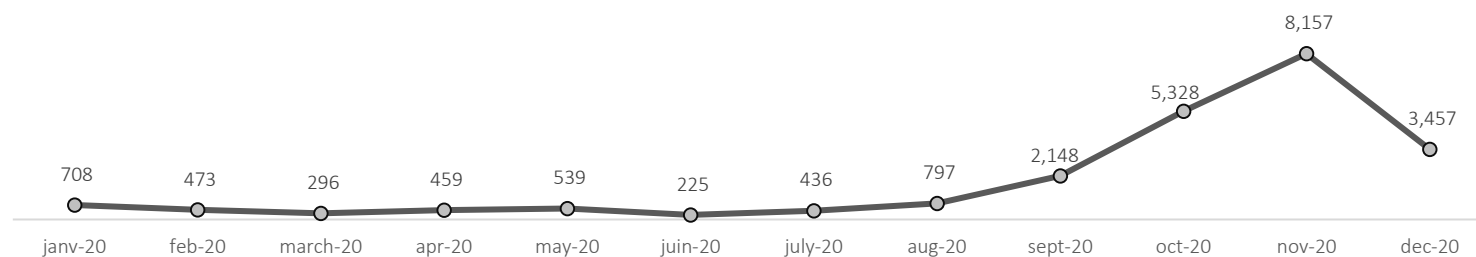
*Number of irregular arrivals of migrants from West and Central Africa to Europe in 2019 and 2020, and proportion of total arrivals, by main country of arrival and year*

This sharp reduction of migration flows to Europe, and in particular of arrivals from West and Central African nationals, can be explained by multiple factors; stricter border surveillance, enhanced and strengthened cooperation agreements on border controls, COVID-19 mobility restrictions, decreased livelihood opportunities and incomes for potential migrants, as well as higher risks of travels.

### Reactivation of West African Atlantic Route (WAAR)

In 2020, the routes taken by migrants witnessed a notable shift: a key trend observed in 2020 was the ‘reactivation’ of the West African Atlantic Route (WAAR). According to the Spanish Ministry of the Interior, 23,023 individuals landed irregularly on the Canary Islands in 2020, an increase of 20,336 individuals when compared to 2019 (2,698). The fourth quarter saw the biggest spike in arrivals, with numbers growing exponentially from October. The increase in departures along this dangerous route was accompanied by an increase in deaths and disappearances. Twelve shipwrecks were recorded along the WAAR in 2020, resulting in the deaths of 849 migrants, half of which were presumed drowned. As a point of comparison, in 2019, 16 shipwrecks caused the death of 210 migrants.

**23,023 individuals arrived irregularly on the Canary Islands in 2020, as compared to 2,698 individuals in 2019**



*Irregular migrant arrivals to the Canary Islands in 2020*

**Migration is an integral part of life in West and Central Africa**

**This report provides an overview of the main population movement trends in West and Central Africa in 2020**

# INTRODUCTION

Migration is an integral part of life in West and Central Africa, a long tradition embedded in its historical, economic, social and cultural fabric. The region is a pivotal area of mobility, home to strong intraregional migration and, thanks to its strategic location at the crossroads, close exchanges with other regions.

Home to an estimated population of 459 million, of which 43 per cent are under the age of 15, the region hosted 9,5 million international migrants in 2020<sup>3</sup>. Diverse economic opportunities throughout the region, seasonal and circular movements and agropastoral transhumance spur large internal migration flows. As such, West and Central Africa is witness to some of the closest and most intense migration flows in the world and home to intricate mobility networks and routes. At the same time, inter-regional mobility involves large movements of people to and from North Africa, Europe, North America, the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa.

Because of multiple, cross-cutting and mutually reinforcing vulnerabilities, including demographic pressure; dwindling resources; economic and climate shocks and environmental degradation; long-standing communal tensions; and violent extremism, West and Central Africa is also the setting of several complex security crises which have displaced millions of people. With more than 7.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 1.3 million refugees and asylum-seekers recorded by the end of the year 2020, countries in the region continue to experience significant levels of internal and cross-border displacement.

The “A Region on the Move” report aims to provide an overview of the main population movement trends in the West and Central Africa region (WCA) in 2020. It presents regional mobility using two broad strokes: internal displacement and migration flows. In each of these sections, the report showcases the primary mobility trends, key events, and profiles of mobile populations observed in 2020. The 2020 edition of the report also includes a section exploring in detail the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on regional mobility and on migrant populations.

The analysis builds on multiple data sources, most of them directly managed and collected by IOM, with external sources used to further complement the mobility picture and provide a holistic understanding of population movement dynamics in West and Central Africa. IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), which monitors internal forced displacements, migration flows, and characteristics of populations on the move, as well as other data on migration flows, targeting specific sub-groups (such as transhumant herders, migrants departing from Senegalese coasts, or migrant stocks in Mauritania) at different stages of their migration journey, constitutes the main data source for the report. . At the regional level, the Data and Research Unit was established to enhance coordination, harmonize the different data sources and foster a multi-layered analysis of regional migration data.

<sup>3</sup> UNDESA, *World Population Prospects 2019*, 2020.



# FORCED DISPLACEMENT

MOBILITY TRENDS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

# FORCED DISPLACEMENT

West and Central Africa hosts one of the largest displaced populations worldwide. Conflicts, insecurity and generalized violence, violent extremism, limited government services and institutions, high levels of poverty, environmental vulnerabilities, natural disasters and climate change all contribute to high levels of displacement in the region<sup>4</sup>. Displacement in West and Central Africa is complex, with multiple factors overlapping and reinforcing one another, and near-term drivers compounded by structural factors<sup>5</sup>. Thus, violent extremism may be, and often is, rooted in economic hardship, disaffection with the government, perceived grievances, or limited State institutions and authority, while conflicts surrounding the control of resources may rekindle or exacerbate underlying ethnic or religious animosity.

In the past decade, displacement in West and Central Africa has been dynamic, at times decreasing when improved security or peace agreements have enabled people to return home; at other times, the numbers have increased due to renewed conflict, violence or unsustainable returns<sup>6</sup>.

As of December 2020, over 7.5 million individuals were estimated to be internally displaced in West and Central Africa, while UNHCR reported that 1.3 million refugees were displaced by crises in the region<sup>7</sup>. An additional 3.5 million former IDP Returnees and nearly 1 million Returnees from abroad are also accounted for.

Internal displacement in countries across the region grew significantly in 2020- they increased by 32 per cent (up from 5,739,830) since December 2019. The countries hosting the largest internally displaced populations were Nigeria (3,021,931 IDPs), Cameroon (1,077,767 IDPs), Burkina Faso (1,049,767) and the Central African Republic (725,927 IDPs). Displacement was primarily driven by conflict, human rights violations and insecurity, with several situations witnessing an escalation in violence and hostilities as well as a worsening of security conditions. Indeed, this year witnessed a worsening of regional crises, as internal displacement accelerated throughout the region. Burkina Faso hosted the third largest number of newly displaced in the world, behind only the Syrian Arab Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)<sup>8</sup>.



**West and Central Africa hosts 7.5 million IDPs, one of the largest displaced populations worldwide**



**The number of IDPs grew by 32% in 2020**

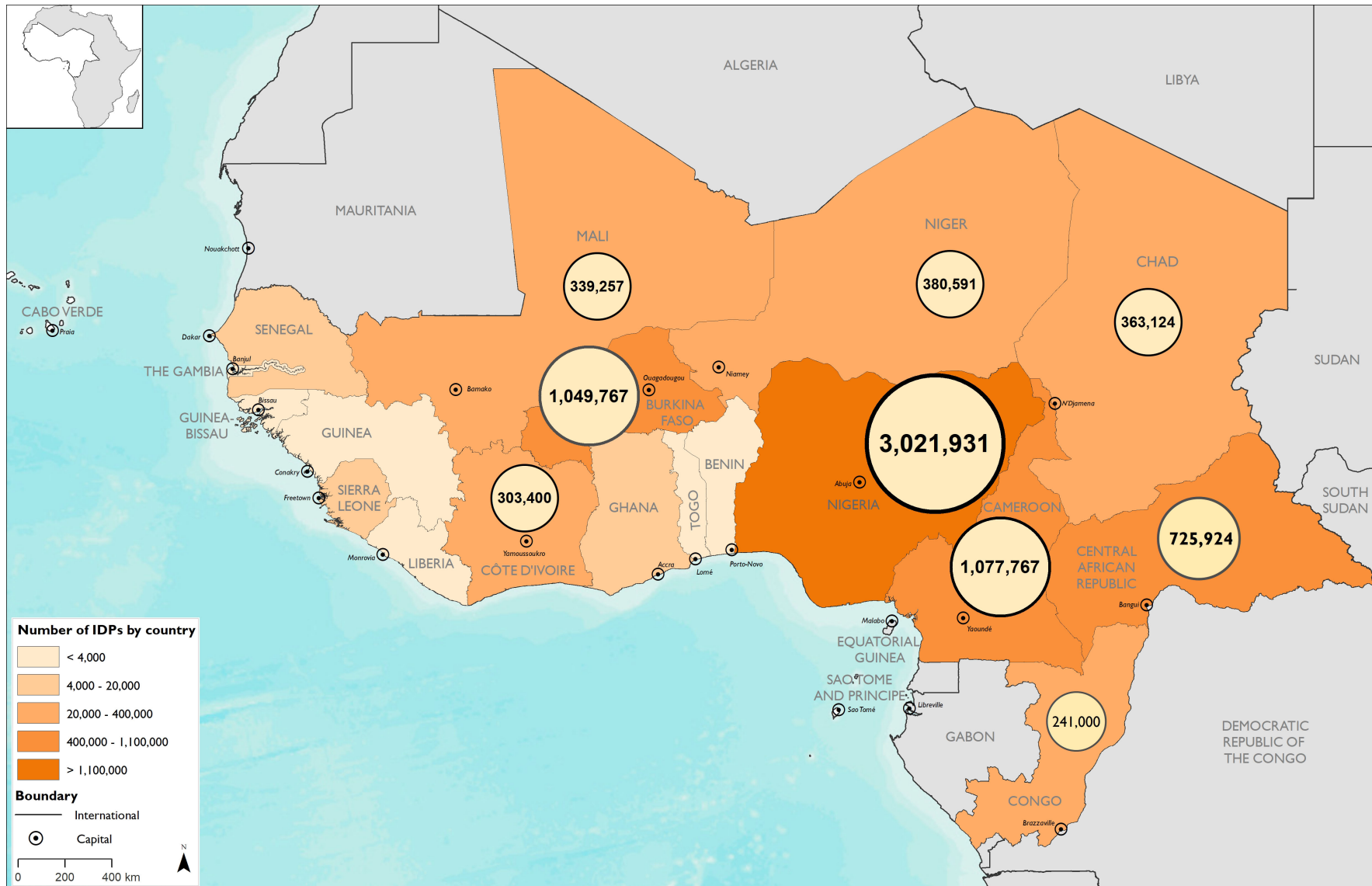
<sup>4</sup> Ferris, Elizabeth and Stark, Chareen, *Internal Displacement in West Africa: A Snapshot*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> ACSS, *Shifting Borders: Africa's Displacement Crisis and Its Security Implications*, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Ferris, Elizabeth and Stark, Chareen, *Internal Displacement in West Africa: A Snapshot*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR figures. This number includes refugees displaced by crises in West and Central Africa and does not include refugees from other regions residing in West and Central Africa, most notably Sudanese refugees in Eastern Chad and Refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Central African Republic.

<sup>8</sup> IDMC, *Internal Displacement 2020: Mid-Year Update*, July 2020.



Map 1. Number of IDPs in the 9 countries hosting the largest IDP populations in West and Central Africa, in 2020<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> IDMC, *Internal Displacement 2020: Mid-Year Update*, July 2020; CONASUR, *Enregistrement des Personnes déplacées internes du Burkina Faso*, 31 December 2020; CMP, *Personnes déplacées internes en République centrafricaine*, 31 December 2020; IOM Mali, *Rapport sur les déplacements (Décembre 2020)*, February 2021; IOM Chad, *Rapport sur les déplacements 13 (11 Septembre — 5 Octobre 2020)*, January 2021; IOM Cameroon, *Rapport sur les déplacements 21 (25 Mai — 10 Juin 2020)*, July 2020; IOM Nigeria, *North East Displacement Report 35 (December 2020)*, March 2021; IOM Nigeria, *North West & North Central Displacement Report 5 (January 2021)*, March 2021; UNHCR Cameroon, *Statistiques des personnes relevant de la compétence du HCR*, 31 December 2020; UNHCR Niger, *Population of Concern Map*, 31 December 2020.



## 1. IMPACT OF COVID-19

### Impact of COVID-19 on displacement and IDP populations

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the risks and vulnerabilities faced by displaced populations living in countries with some of the weakest health systems in the world. Because of their vulnerable situations, displaced populations, similarly to migrant communities, are more at risk than the general population of being adversely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis<sup>10</sup>. Mobility restrictions and other measures imposed by countries to limit the spread of the coronavirus; unsanitary conditions in which displaced populations may live; promiscuity in displacement camps; limited access to services; and the economic impacts of the crisis have all contributed to increasing the vulnerable situations of IDPs.

#### *Economic impact*

Displaced populations have been severely affected by the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. National lockdowns, restrictions in internal mobility, closure of businesses and public spaces and the fear of the virus have had significant impacts on trade, commerce and business. Closure of markets and schools and measures restricting mobility took a toll on IDPs livelihoods, access to food, nutrition and education<sup>11</sup>. Displaced individuals mainly work in the informal sector and are often the first to lose their jobs during times of crisis<sup>12</sup>. A study by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) found that in Mali, 67 per cent of surveyed displaced persons had lost their job or income generating activity as a result of the crisis. In addition, the global economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had led to a decrease in remittances from the diaspora, which many displaced individuals rely on. The losses of income and employment resulting from the crisis have had adverse knock-on effects, making it harder for displaced populations to have access to food, housing<sup>13</sup> and education<sup>14</sup>.

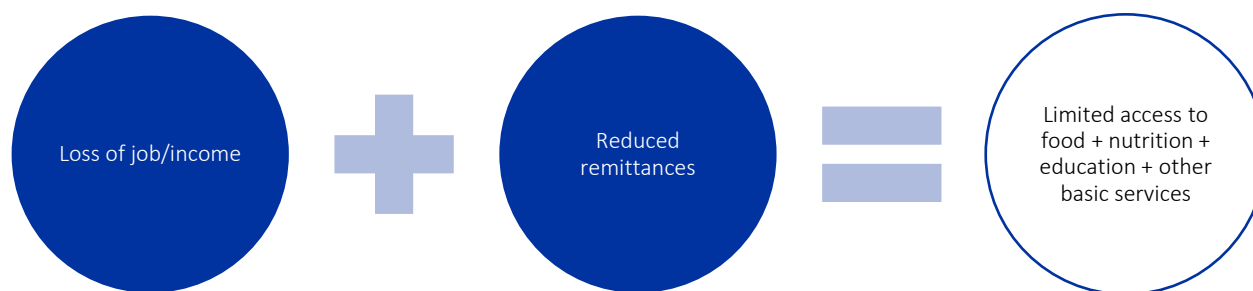


Figure 1. Impact of COVID-19 on IDPs in West and Central Africa



**67% of surveyed IDPs lost their employment or income generating activity because of the COVID-19 crisis**

<sup>10</sup> Refugees International, *COVID-19 and the Displaced: Addressing the Threat of the Novel Coronavirus in Humanitarian Emergencies*, 30 March 2020.

<sup>11</sup> OCHA, *Overview of Humanitarian Needs and Requirements: Sahel Crisis*, May 2020.

<sup>12</sup> IOM, WFP, *Population at risk: Implications of COVID-19 for hunger, migration and displacement*, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> However, DTM assessments in North East Nigeria found that only 4 per cent of IDPs had faced eviction threats.

<sup>14</sup> NRC, *Downward Spiral: The economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees and displaced people*, December 2020.

*Health impact*

Beyond the economic impact on IDPs and refugees, the COVID-19 crisis has also exposed the heightened sanitary and health risks confronted by displaced populations. Many refugees and IDPs living in crowded environments are also at high risk, in camps and informal sites<sup>15</sup>, which are promiscuous and often unhygienic environments, making these groups highly susceptible to health risks<sup>16</sup>. According to DTM assessments, 35 per cent of IDPs in Cameroon's Far North have to walk over an hour to reach the nearest health centre, while only 36 per cent and 52 per cent of displacement sites in Mali and CAR, respectively, had health services available. Displaced persons also often struggle with underlying health conditions, including malnutrition, psychosocial stress, and other infectious diseases. These conditions make them more vulnerable in a public health emergency<sup>17</sup>.

*Access to basic goods & services and humanitarian assistance*

Measures implemented by governments to limit the spread of COVID-19 have had a direct impact on IDPs' access to services. Lockdowns, mobility restrictions and impeded access to displacement sites has reduced the provision of goods and services to IDP populations<sup>18</sup>. DTM assessments in Nigeria's North East found that 56 per cent of sites hosting IDPs experienced disruptions in basic services, including health services, education, food and nutrition support, water delivery and protection services<sup>19</sup>. In Cameroon, basic services were either unavailable or shut down in 43 per cent of locations assessed by DTM. The socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic have increased the prevalence of acute food insecurity amongst displaced communities. With most displaced persons unable to access social protection systems, this reduction in service delivery impacted heavily on IDPs and exacerbated their vulnerabilities<sup>20</sup>.

Furthermore, restrictions in mobility have made it harder to ship goods and services, leading to disruptions in the supply chain, scarcity of goods and services and increased prices of basic goods. In Cameroon, DTM assessments have found that in 49 per cent of locations hosting IDPs, basic necessities had become scarcer, while the prices of goods had risen in 56 per cent of locations<sup>21</sup>.

Finally, the crisis impeded humanitarian response and assistance and disrupted the humanitarian supply chain. Mobility restrictions imposed by governments have curtailed humanitarian access, restricted the movement of lifesaving supplies and made it more challenging for response actors to reach affected communities. In many contexts, relief workers reduced contact with displaced communities to help prevent spread of the virus<sup>22</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has also upset efforts to find durable solutions and implement reconstruction and recovery initiatives, increasing the risk of stagnation and protraction of IDPs' situation and impeding efforts to ease displacement conditions<sup>23</sup>.



**Basic services were unavailable in 43% of IDP-hosting locations in Cameroon**

**The COVID-19 crisis disrupted the humanitarian supply chain**

<sup>15</sup> According to DTM assessments, 70 per cent, 56 per cent, 43 per cent and 30 per cent of IDPs live in formal and informal sites in Chad, Mali, Nigeria and the Central African Republic, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> IOM, WFP, *Population at risk: Implications of COVID-19 for hunger, migration and displacement*, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Refugees International, *COVID-19 and the Displaced: Addressing the Threat of the Novel Coronavirus in Humanitarian Emergencies*, 30 March 2020; IDMC, *Internal Displacement 2020: Mid-Year Update*, July 2020.

<sup>18</sup> IOM, WFP, *Population at risk: Implications of COVID-19 for hunger, migration and displacement*, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> IOM Nigeria, *COVID-19 Situational Analysis: North East*, November 2020.

<sup>20</sup> OECD, *The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on forcibly displaced persons in developing countries*, June 2020.

<sup>21</sup> IOM Cameroon, *Rapport sur les déplacements 21 (25 mai – 10 juin 2020)*, July 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Refugees International, *COVID-19 and the Displaced: Addressing the Threat of the Novel Coronavirus in Humanitarian Emergencies*, 30 March 2020; NRC, *Downward Spiral: The economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees and displaced people*, December 2020.

<sup>23</sup> IDMC, *Internal Displacement 2020: Mid-Year Update*, July 2020.

## Measures taken to mitigate the impact of COVID-19

To combat the spread of COVID-19 amongst displaced populations, government authorities and humanitarian actors, including IOM, took substantial measures to improve hygiene conditions, reduce overcrowding and raise awareness in displacement sites. Measures have included awareness raising amongst IDPs; sensitization on preventive measures and symptoms; installation of additional hand washing stations; distribution of hand sanitizers; isolation of suspected cases; construction of quarantine facilities; and mobility restrictions within and to and from sites<sup>24</sup>. In Nigeria, to decongest crowded camps, IOM rehabilitated buildings to accommodate IDPs living in crowded reception centres and assisted with the relocation of camp residents to new, less congested shelters.

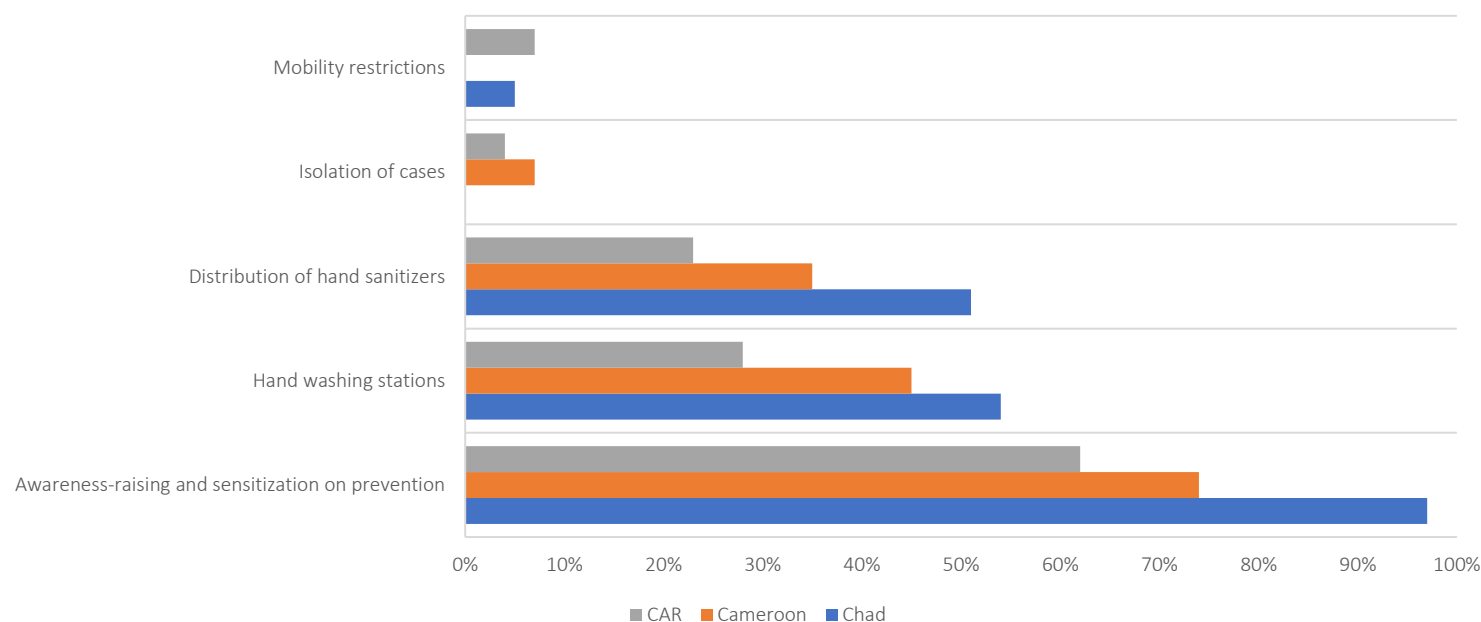


Figure 2. Prevention measures taken against COVID-19 in IDP-hosting locations in Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad<sup>25</sup>

These efforts have had mixed impacts on IDPs’ awareness, hygiene practices and adoption of protective measures in the face of COVID-19. IOM’s DTM conducted evaluations to assess awareness of and measures taken against COVID-19 by displaced populations. Assessments found that awareness raising campaigns were only relatively effective, with the share of displaced individuals who had knowledge of the COVID-19

<sup>24</sup> IOM was not involved in the setup or implementation of mobility restriction measures.

<sup>25</sup> IOM Chad, *Rapport sur les déplacements 13 (11 Septembre — 5 Octobre 2020)*, January 2021 ; IOM Cameroon, *Rapport sur les déplacements 21 (25 Mai — 10 Juin 2020)*, July 2020 ; IOM CAR, *Rapport sur les déplacements 11 (Décembre 2020)*, March 2021.



**Misinformation, mistrust of authorities, lack of communication networks and language barriers at times prevented effective messaging on COVID-19**

pandemic rising in Mali, for instance<sup>26</sup>, but dropping in Nigeria and Chad. Likewise, fewer IDPs were adopting preventive and mitigating measures in Nigeria's North East at the end of the year (25%) than at the start of the crisis (30%). However, a slightly larger share of IDPs indicated that health centres in displacement sites were prepared to address the epidemic and treat patients with COVID-19 (20% against 13%), and a majority of IDPs (56%) adapted their hygiene and sanitation practices. On the other hand, in CAR, 40 per cent of IDPs changed their hygiene practices as a result of the pandemic, while practices remained unchanged for 60 per cent of IDPs.

Additionally, the often limited access to reliable information for displaced communities complicated efforts to respond. Misinformation, mistrust of authorities, the absence of communication networks, and language barriers at times prevented effective messaging.



*A mural warning against the risks of COVID-19 in Arlit, Niger © IOM/Monica Chiriatic 2020*

<sup>26</sup> The number of sites in which almost all IDPs were aware of the coronavirus grew from 55 per cent to 65 per cent, while the share of sites at which only few IDPs were aware of the virus decreased from 30 per cent to 25 per cent. See IOM Mali, *Rapport sur les déplacements (Juillet 2020)*, September 2020.



**Five regional crises represent 88% of internal displacement in West and Central Africa**

## 2. REGIONAL CRISES

Five main regional crises beset West and Central Africa: the Lake Chad Basin Crisis, which covers North East Nigeria, Cameroon’s Far North, Diffa region in Niger and Chad’s Lac Province; the Central Sahel/Liptako Gourma crisis (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger’s Tahoua and Tillabéri regions), which is fast becoming one of the world’s worst humanitarian disasters<sup>27</sup>; the Central African Republic crisis; Nigeria’s North Central-North West crisis, which in 2020 spread to Niger’s Maradi Region; and Cameroon’s North West-South West crisis, also known as the Anglophone Crisis. These five crises represent 88 per cent of the 7.5 million displaced individuals in West and Central Africa.

These crises all share common traits: the struggle for control over natural resources and key infrastructure; climate change and dwindling natural resources creating tensions between communities, increasing the frequency and severity of natural disasters and generating displacement; demographic growth and resulting pressure on land and natural resources; violent extremism and separatism<sup>28</sup>; the exploitation of tensions between ethnic or religious communities by Non-State Armed Groups, criminal or rebel groups; and the absence of the State. The commonalities between the crises underscores the similar challenges, issues and problems common to the entire West and Central Africa region.

Furthermore, the environmental dimension is a key factor underlying these situations, which have emerged from a unique conflation of converging climate factors. Escalating tensions, insecurity and conflict are amplified by climate shocks, in a region where 80 per cent of the population depends on natural resources for their livelihoods<sup>29</sup>. In a region with one of the world’s highest population growth rates, environmental disasters, dwindling resources and rising food prices begotten by climate change have increased vulnerabilities, heightened tensions and fueled new conflicts and forced migration.

These crises have led to high numbers of attacks directly targeting civilian populations and public institutions such as health facilities, community centres and schools, leading to the death of more than 5,700 civilians<sup>30</sup> and the abduction of thousands more. This has created an unmatched protection crisis with devastating impacts on the survival, education, development and health of children<sup>31</sup>.

Insecurity and attacks are disrupting the provision of basic social services, depriving violence-affected people and host communities of critical services. The regions affected by the five crises face alarming deterioration in food security, with chronic climatic factors impacting food production and availability and upsurges in violence and insecurity driving chronic lack of food. It is estimated that 12 million individuals are facing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity in the Sahel alone<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> NRC, “[A record one million displaced by violence in Burkina Faso amid COVID-19](#)”, 18 August 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Except in Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis.

<sup>29</sup> OCHA, *Overview of Humanitarian Needs and Requirements: Sahel Crisis*, May 2020.

<sup>30</sup> ACLED, *ACLED Dashboard*

<sup>31</sup> OCHA, *Overview of Humanitarian Needs and Requirements: Sahel Crisis*, May 2020.

<sup>32</sup> OCHA, *Overview of Humanitarian Needs and Requirements: Sahel Crisis*, May 2020.

Several other situations in West and Central Africa region, while mostly internal and not regional in scope, have caused largescale internal and cross-border displacement, with hundreds of thousands of people displaced:

- Eastern Chad continues to host hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees displaced by the 2003 Darfur War. More recently, violence flared in 2019 and 2020 in Western Sudan, forcing an estimated 3,000 Refugees to find shelter on the Chadian side of the border<sup>33</sup>. As of 31 December 2020, Chad hosted 370,000 Sudanese refugees.
- Côte d’Ivoire hosts an estimated 303,000 IDPs, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). They were primarily displaced by the 2002-2007 civil war and the political and constitutional crisis which followed the 2010 Presidential elections. In 2020, contested Presidential elections held on 31 October led to the displacement of 10,000 individuals, most of whom fled preventively out of fear of violence.
- Finally, the Republic of Congo hosts 241,000 IDPs. Devastating floods in recent years have displaced over 100,000 individuals, with floods growing more destructive each year. An addition 140,000 people were displaced following violent clashes between rebel forces and the army.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> UN News, [“Violence in Sudan’s Western Darfur forces 2,500 into Chad: UN refugee agency”](#)

<sup>34</sup> OCHA, Center for Humanitarian Data, [“Making sense of displacement data in the Republic of Congo”](#), 2017.

**CAMEROON**

321,886 IDPs

+8% (2019-2020)

**CHAD**

336,124 IDPs

+98% (2019-2020)

**NIGER**

102,726 IDPs

-7% (2019-2020)

**NIGERIA**

2,150,243 IDPs

+6% (2019-2020)

**TOTAL**

2,910,979 IDPs

+11% (2019-2020)

**2. REGIONAL CRISES****LAKE CHAD BASIN CRISIS**

*IDP women in Maiduguri, Nigeria © IOM/Jessica Mamo 2019*

The Lake Chad Basin, which is composed of North East Geopolitical Zone in Nigeria, Lac Province in Chad, Far North Region in Cameroon and Diffa Region in Niger, has been facing an insurgency by Boko Haram and deriving Non-States Armed Groups - in 2016, Boko Haram split between two factions (Islamic State West Africa Province, or ISWAP, and Boko Haram) - since 2009, first affecting North-East Nigeria before spreading in 2014-2015 to neighbouring Cameroon (Far North Region), Chad (Lac Province) and Niger (Diffa Region). The insurgency by these groups generates high levels of violence, marked by brutal campaigns of attacks on civilians and defense forces and violent counterinsurgencies by security forces, and has led to mass displacements of population.



**The number of IDPs in the Lake Chad Basin grew by 11% in 2020**

In addition to the insurgency, the Lake Chad Basin is affected by several threat multipliers, factors which exacerbate existing risks and feed into the conflict, while their impact are themselves compounded by the crisis. Climate variability, which includes unpredictable rainfall patterns, flooding, drought and landslides, is a significant contributor to the crisis: in addition to displacing large, and growing, numbers of people, climatic events aggravate existing fragilities and foster instability and insecurity; at the same time, the conflict contributes to environmental degradation, livelihood insecurity and increased poverty, undermining the ability to adapt to and heightening vulnerabilities in the face of climate change<sup>35</sup>. The Lake Chad Basin is also characterized by communal conflicts, as tensions between communities deepened and new fractures emerged in the context of the crisis affecting the region.

#### Evolution of crisis over reporting period

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	TREND 2019
CAMEROON	321,886	+8%
CHAD	336,124	+98%
NIGER	102,726	-8%
NIGERIA	2,150,243	+6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,910,979</b>	<b>+11%</b>

*Table 1. Number of IDPs in the Lake Chad Basin, as of December 2020*<sup>36</sup>

As of 31 December 2020, the Lake Chad Basin hosted 2,910,979 IDPs, 258,591 Refugees, 1,736,451 Former IDP Returnees and 221,628 Returnees from abroad. Over three-quarters of the affected population (76%, representing 3,893,150 individuals) were located in Nigeria, while 11 per cent resided in Cameroon (561,296 individuals), 8 per cent in Chad (409,610 individuals) and 5 per cent in Niger (263,593 individuals)<sup>37</sup>. In 2019 and 2020, the crisis affecting the Lake Chad Basin worsened markedly, after witnessing a relatively positive evolution between 2016 and 2018. Volatile security conditions, frequent attacks on security forces, civilians and humanitarian workers and intensifying conflict, abuses and other violations generated significant displacement of populations. Close to 113,000 additional persons were internally displaced between January and December 2020 (an increase of 11 per cent in the number of IDPs), to reach 2,910,979 IDPs. The rising number of internally displaced is a result of the multiplication of attacks by insurgent groups as well as the intensification in the frequency and magnitude of floods, which are displacing a growing number of individuals<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, in 2020 the vast majority of IDPs continued to be displaced by the armed conflict and insurgency.

<sup>35</sup> ADELPHI, *Climate-Fragility Profile: Lake Chad Basin*, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> IOM Chad, *Rapport sur les déplacements 13 (11 Septembre — 5 Octobre 2020)*, January 2021 ; IOM Cameroon, *Rapport sur les déplacements 21 (25 Mai — 10 Juin 2020)*, July 2020 ; IOM Nigeria, *North East Displacement Report 35 (December 2020)*, March 2021 ; UNHCR Niger, *Population of Concern Map*, 31 December 2020.

<sup>37</sup> IOM, *Lake Chad Basin Crisis Monthly Dashboard 25*, 21 October 2020.

<sup>38</sup> In Cameroon, for instance, 20 per cent of displacements which occurred in 2020, and 57 per cent of displacements in 2019, were caused by climatic events. Throughout the Lake Chad Basin, 2 per cent of all IDPs were displaced by natural disasters, compared to 1 per cent in 2016. See DTM Cameroon, *Displacement Report 21*, July 2020.



## The number of IDPs in Chad doubled, overtaking the number of IDPs in Cameroon



## Returns of formerly displaced persons to their location of origin grew by 8% in 2020

The crisis has evolved differently in affected countries. While the numbers of IDPs in both Nigeria and Cameroon grew by 6 per cent and 8 per cent over the year, they did so at lower rates than in Chad: internal displacement witnessed a significant burst in the country, as the number of IDPs doubled over the course of the year (from 169,003 IDPs in September 2019 to 336,124 IDPs in October 2020). For the first time since the crisis spread to all four countries of the Lake Chad Basin, the number of IDPs in Chad's Lac Province (336,124) overtook that in Cameroon's Far North (321,886), suggesting that the crisis is intensifying significantly in Chad. Notably, the number of IDPs witnessed a 7 per cent drop in Niger's Diffa Region.

Displacement in the Lake Chad Basin is not only internal. Since the crisis started in 2009, hundreds of thousands of Nigerians fled the violence to seek refuge in the three other countries of the Lake Chad Basin. As of 31 December 2020, there were 258,591 Nigerian Refugees in Niger (126,543), Cameroon (115,921) and Chad (16,127). When compared to January 2020, the number of Refugees increased by 8 per cent, an exemplar of the deterioration in security in North East Nigeria and beyond.

Despite continued insecurity and displacement across the Lake Chad Basin, returns of formerly displaced persons to their location of origin, a phenomenon which has been continuously observed since the implementation of DTM return assessments, continued in 2020, with the number of returnees increasing by 8 per cent over the year (from 1,813,307 to 1,961,955). The stabilization of several 'pockets of stability' in the region, combined with the reduction in available assistance and services and worsening living conditions in displacement locations, are behind the increase in returns observed in the region. However, despite growing returns in certain areas, the overall perception of security and, consequently, the intentions of IDPs to return to their areas of origin, has worsened in 2020 when compared to 2019 which might lead to a decrease of returns in 2021. This is exemplified by surveys conducted with displaced households in Cameroon and Chad, which showed that in 2020, fewer displaced households intended to leave their current displacement location when compared to 2019. In Cameroon, this share dropped from a high of 26 per cent in April 2019 to 20 per cent in August 2020<sup>39</sup>, while in Chad, only 9 per cent reported the wish to leave<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, in both contexts, the primary reason preventing the return of displaced households was insecurity, fear of attacks in the area of origin and a sense of security in the displacement location.

In addition, IOM, in collaboration with the Nigerian government, implemented a programme meant to decongest IDP camps, to ease overcrowding in IDP camps by 50 per cent and voluntarily bring displaced populations back to their regions of origin<sup>41</sup>. In the course of this project, thousands of IDPs were resettled to their areas of origin, thereby contributing to the rise in numbers of returnees.

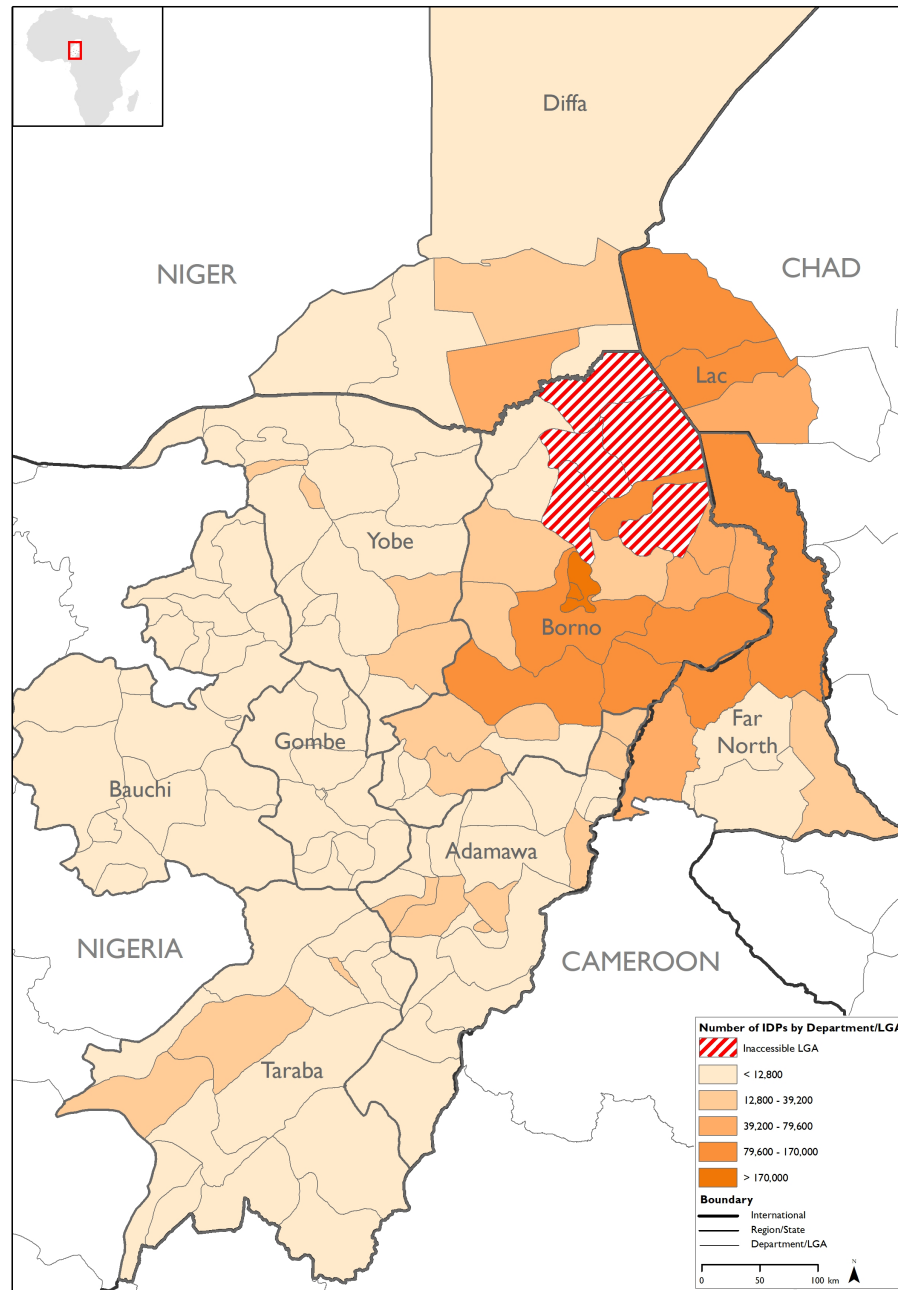
A number of areas in all of the region's four countries have witnessed growing stabilization and safety as well as improved living conditions. In this optic, DTM's Stability Index assessments found that return locations in Cameroon and Nigeria scored an average of 70 out of 100 when assessing security conditions, social cohesion and access to services<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> IOM Cameroon, *Return Intention Survey 21*, August 2020.

<sup>40</sup> IOM Chad, *Lac Province: Return Intention Survey 2*, January 2020.

<sup>41</sup> *Le Monde*, « Au Nigeria, retour en masse des déplacés de Boko Haram », 1 December 2020.

<sup>42</sup> IOM, *Stability Index Report – Cameroon and Nigeria*, September 2019.



Map 2. Distribution of the internally displaced population in the Lake Chad Basin, as of December 2020

## 2. REGIONAL CRISES

### CENTRAL SAHEL/LIPTAKO GOURMA

Central Sahel, which covers the countries of Mali and Burkina Faso as well as the Tahoua and Tillabéri Regions in western Niger, has been hit by a dual crisis, one that has become the fastest-growing humanitarian crisis in the world, displacing over a million people and disrupting the lives of millions more.

Northern Mali has been in the throgs of a civil crisis since 2012, when the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) launched an armed campaign against the Malian government in the north of the country, with the aim to attain independence or greater autonomy for northern Mali. After a *coup d'état* led to a political and leadership vacuum, the MNLA, and subsequently Non-State Armed Groups taking advantage of the power vacuum, gained significant territory and control of Northern Mali. Following the intervention of foreign forces and years of conflict, a peace agreement was signed between the Government of Mali and northern rebels in Bamako in April 2015, officially ending the conflict. Despite the peace agreement, Northern Mali continues to face high levels of violence and frequent attacks by Non-State Armed Groups.

Expanding from this crisis, the Central Sahel Region has, since 2016, seen an unprecedented surge in violence, implicating violent extremism, banditry, communal conflicts, localized conflicts, erosion of people's access to essential services and limited government services<sup>43</sup>. The crisis is primarily spurred by a southward push on the part of NSAG, conflicts for the control of resources rekindled by climate factors, the absence of effective State control and communal tensions<sup>44</sup>. Violence in Mali spread from the north of the country to Central Mali, which has seen a steep worsening of violence and conflict since 2015 as extremist groups expanded their spheres of influence. Meanwhile, violence soon spilled over into Burkina Faso, which witnessed a dramatic increase of attacks by NSAG, in particular Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), and the locally grown Ansaroul Islam, and has now become the epicenter of violence in Central Sahel<sup>45</sup>. Violence soon spread to the Tahoua and Tillabéri regions in western Niger and now affects the entirety of the Liptako Gourma region.

#### Evolution of crisis over reporting period

The crisis affecting Central Sahel escalated sharply in 2020, a continuation of the increase in violence observed since 2018. According to ACLED data, the mortality rate for the first eight months of 2020 was higher than that of any previous year in the decade preceding that year, making it the deadliest year of the crisis. In fact, the number of casualties linked to the crisis has doubled since 2017, demonstrating the spread of the violence as well as the growth in attacks and conflicts throughout Central Sahel. While most fatalities in 2019 (46%) occurred in Burkina Faso,



#### BURKINA FASO

1,074,993 IDPs

+97% (2019-2020)

#### MALI

332,957 IDPs

+60% (2019-2020)

#### NIGER

138,229 IDPs

+77% (2019-2020)

#### TOTAL

1,546,179 IDPs

+86% (2019-2020)

<sup>43</sup> Institute for Security Studies, *Extremism and conflict in Liptako-Gourma*, 2018; OCHA, *Overview of Humanitarian Needs and Requirements: Sahel Crisis*, May 2020.

<sup>44</sup> FIDH, *Dans le centre du Mali, les populations prises au piège du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme*, November 2018.

<sup>45</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, *"Burkina Faso: Jihadists' Ethnic Strategy"*, in *Terrorism Monitor*, December 2019.

as violence escalated in the country and violent groups ramped up their attacks, the biggest number of deaths in 2020 (45%) were observed in Mali. This highlights the aggravation of the situation in Central Mali, marked by widespread communal clashes and numerous attacks by Non-State Armed Groups.

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	TREND 2019
BURKINA FASO	1,074,993	+97%
MALI	332,957	+60
NIGER	138,229	+77%
TOTAL	1,546,179	+86%

*Table 2. Number of IDPs in Central Sahel, as of December 2020* <sup>46</sup>

As of 31 December 2020, the region hosted an estimated 2,388,742 affected individuals, including 1,546,179 IDPs, 175,835 Refugees and 666,728 Returnees (including 582,079 former IDP Returnees and 84,649 Returnees from abroad). This represents a 47 per cent increase from the number of affected individuals a year earlier (1,619,863). The number of internally displaced grew by 86 per cent (up from 831,706), in large part driven by displacement in Burkina Faso, which more than doubled over the course of the year, reaching 1,074,993 IDPs by the end of the year. Close to 70 per cent of IDPs are found in Burkina Faso, showcasing the fact that the country has become the epicenter of the crisis over the past two years. This sharp rise in internal displacement throughout Central Sahel is the result of the proliferation of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG) and militias, inter- and intra- communal conflicts, and the multiplication of human rights abuses in the region<sup>47</sup>. The factors are exacerbated by ancient inter-community tensions, changes in agricultural production, climate variability, demographic growth, conflicts between herders and farmers and the absence of State institutions and effective redress mechanisms<sup>48</sup>.

The number of refugees also witnessed a significant increase of 83 per cent, growing from 96,270 to 175,835, as displaced individuals increasingly find refuge in neighbouring countries. In addition, and despite insecurity, return movements in Mali continued, with the number of returnees increasing by 5 per cent (up from 637,654 in December 2019, including 561,606 former IDP Returnees and 76,048 Repatriated individuals). Return movements are primarily the result of households formerly displaced by the 2012-2015 crisis in Mali returning home.

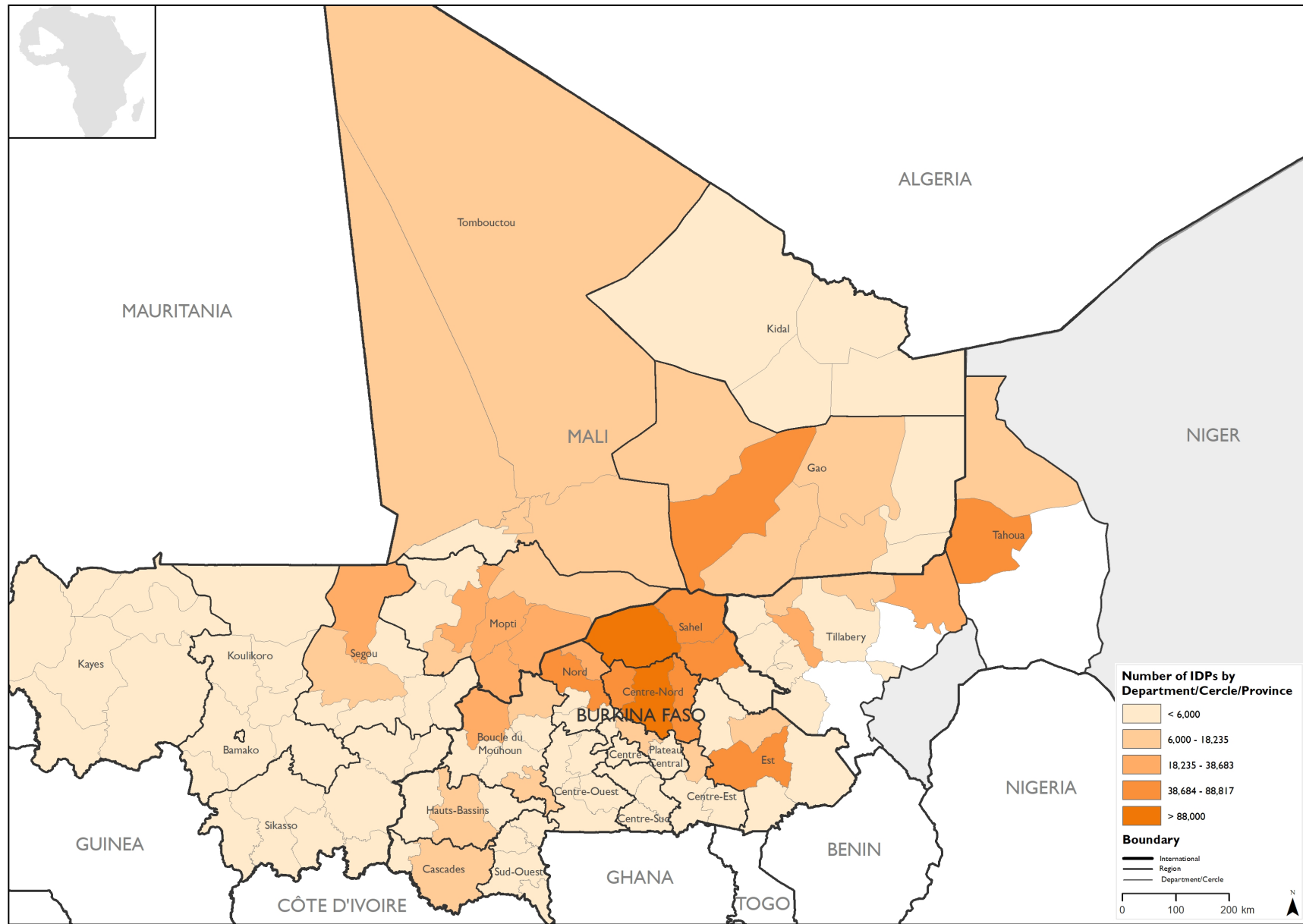


**The number of IDPs in the Liptako Gourma grew by 86% in 2020, driven in large part by displacement in Burkina Faso, which became the epicentre of the crisis**

<sup>46</sup> CONASUR, *Enregistrement des Personnes déplacées internes du Burkina Faso*, 31 December 2020 ; IOM Mali, *Rapport sur les déplacements (Décembre 2020)*, February 2021; UNHCR Niger, *Population of Concern Map*, 31 December 2020.

<sup>47</sup> ACF, FAO, OIM, *“United Nations call for urgent strengthening of the protection of civilian populations in the Sahel”*, 11 June 2020.

<sup>48</sup> FIDH, *Dans le centre du Mali, les populations prises au piège du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme*, November 2018.



Map 3. Distribution of the internally displaced population in Central Sahel, as of December 2020

**TOTAL**

630,924 IDPs

-10% (2019-2020)

**2. REGIONAL CRISES****CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

*An IDP shelter in the Central African Republic © IOM/Amanda Nero 2017*

The Central African Republic (CAR) has experienced continuous volatility and recurring violent clashes since its independence in 1960. However, the most recent crisis in 2012-2013 has developed into an extremely complex protracted state of permanent insecurity and fragility. The crisis, which is characterized by power struggles amongst elites, the absence of state institutions and public investment, religious and ethnic tensions and contests for the control of key resources<sup>49</sup>, first emerged as a political conflict between predominantly Muslim rebel groups, known as Séléka, and anti-balaka groups, mostly Christian opposition militias. By the end of 2014, Séléka and anti-balaka groups controlled most of the country. Despite the intervention of French and UN Peacekeeping forces, fighting spread and devolved into a crisis of generalized violence

<sup>49</sup> Siradag, Abdurrahim, “Explaining the Conflict in the Central African Republic: Causes and Dynamics”, in *Epiphany*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2016.



**An unparalleled escalation of violence in the context of the Presidential elections led to the displacement of 240,000 IDPs and 100,000 refugees**

involving dozens of armed groups and the perpetration of mass atrocities. In February 2019, the government and rebel groups signed the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (*Accord Politique pour la Paix et la Reconciliation*), known as the Khartoum Agreement, to bring an end to the crisis. The conflict nevertheless continues to affect large swathes of the Central African Republic, with Non-State Armed Groups controlling most of the Central African territory and the country largely a “phantom State”<sup>50</sup>.

In addition to the security crisis, CAR is also shaken by tensions between nomadic pastoralist herders and farmers, which have been deepening as a result of changes in transhumance routes, growing scarcity of natural resources, and antagonism between communities. Tensions between farmers and transhumant herders, which the presence of armed groups has exacerbated, regularly break out into open fighting and have displaced large numbers of individuals. Finally, natural disasters are a significant contributing factor to the crisis affecting CAR, not only because they generate displacement of significant numbers of people, but because they interact with and reinforce other dimensions of the conflict, deepening tensions and heightening vulnerabilities of populations.

#### Evolution of crisis over reporting period

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	TREND 2019
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	630,924	-10%

*Table 3. Number of IDPs in the Central African Republic, as of December 2020*<sup>51</sup>

As of 30 November 2020<sup>52</sup>, a total of 630,924 internally displaced, according to the Commission mouvements de populations (CMP)<sup>53</sup>, in addition to 634,539 Refugees, 843,352 Former IDP Returnees and 328,841 Returnees from abroad<sup>54</sup>. Although the displacement context calmed down significantly in 2020, as rebel groups became much less active, tensions between communities eased and armed violence subsided, the country saw an unparalleled wave of violence in the context of the Presidential and legislative elections which were held on 27 December 2020. The escalation of violence, which has pitted government and MINUSCA forces against a coalition of rebel forces and paralyzed the main corridor linking CAR to Cameroon, through which the vast majority of goods are transported<sup>55</sup>, displaced over 240,000 individuals within CAR, while over 105,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) hosting 90 per cent of new refugees<sup>56</sup>. These numbers are not included in the aforementioned displacement figures, which do not take into account the latest spike in violence.

<sup>50</sup> International Crisis Group, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, Report No. 136, 2007.

<sup>51</sup> CMP, *Personnes déplacées internes en République centrafricaine*, 31 December 2020.

<sup>52</sup> These numbers do not include displacements resulting from electoral violence in late December 2020, and which displaced an estimated 200,000 individuals.

<sup>53</sup> There is no unified nationwide system to track displacement in the Central African Republic. Instead, several actors, including DTM, collect data on the number of displaced populations separately. The Commission sur les mouvements de populations (CMP) provides official government figures on nationwide displacement.

<sup>54</sup> Returnee numbers are collected by DTM CAR through DTM Mobility Tracking activities.

<sup>55</sup> *Le Monde*, « Les attaques de rebelles paralysent la route qui relie le Cameroun et la république centrafricaine », 2 February 2021.

<sup>56</sup> OCHA, *Central African Republic Situation Report: Alarming rise in displacement across the Central African Republic*, 8 February 2021.

**Prior to the political violence, the number of IDPs had decreased by 10% in 2020**



**Floods were the main factor of displacement in 2020**

Prior to this spike in violence and displacement, the number of IDPs witnessed a 10 per cent decrease between January and November 2020 (down from 702,197 individuals). The number of IDPs, however, has not reached the low of 581,000 IDPs which was observed in May 2019 after a lull in fighting which had followed the signing of the Khartoum Agreement. Violence and subsequent displacement had then spiked in late 2019, reaching a high of 702,000 IDPs in January 2020, before seeing a progressive drop in IDP numbers through 2020. The decrease in violence observed in the country may largely be attributed to the Khartoum Agreement, which helped fashion a framework for a ceasefire between parties to the conflict.

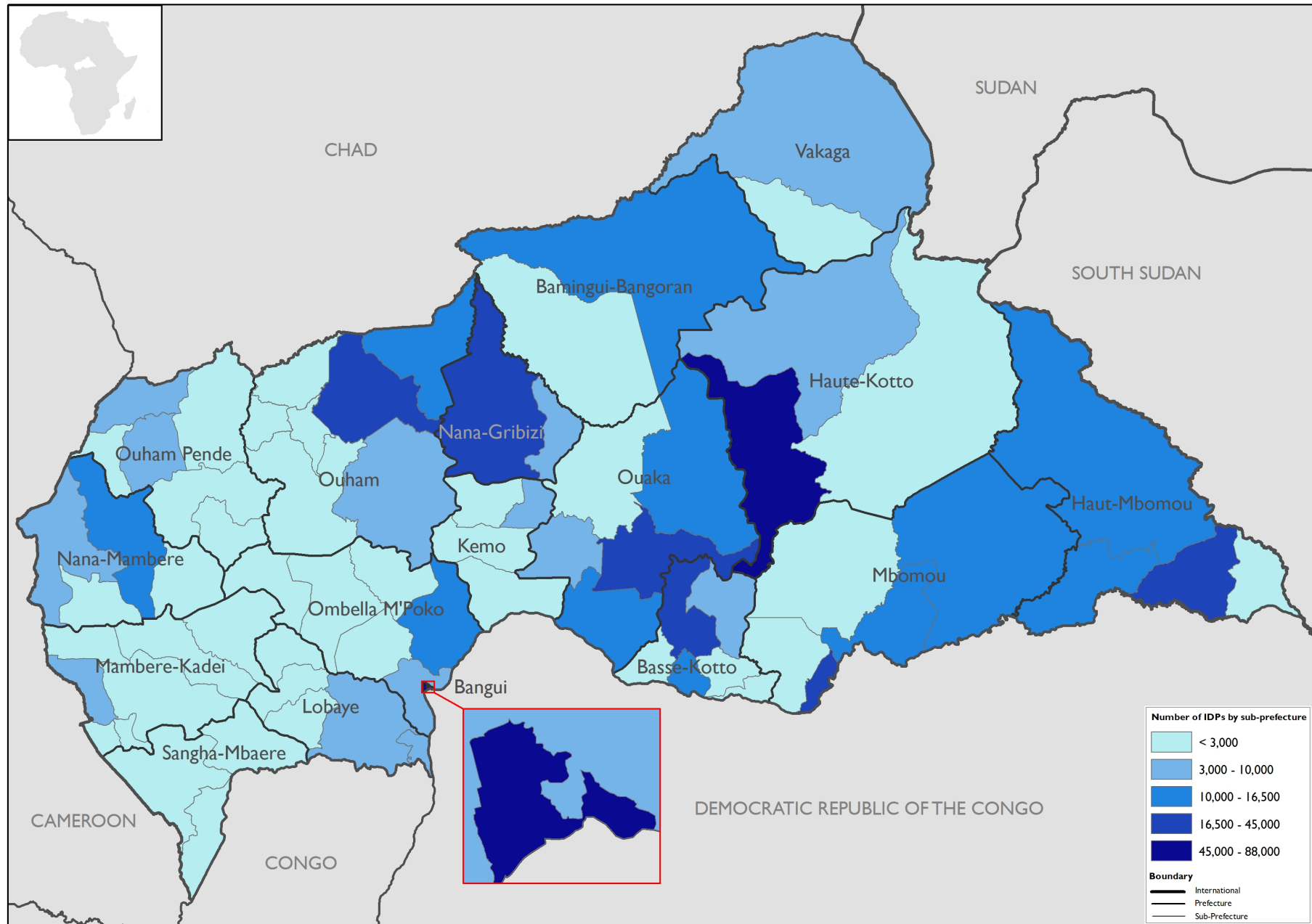
Nevertheless, displacements continued, primarily observed in the Haut-Mbomou prefecture (located in eastern CAR), which witnessed intense fighting between multiple Non-State Armed Groups, as well as Bamingui-Bangoran (northern CAR), Ombella Mpoko (south-west CAR) and the capital Bangui, where large-scale communal conflicts as well as devastating floods led to the displacement of significant numbers of people. Floods were among the leading causes of displacement in the second half of the year, representing 50 per cent of new displacements, followed by conflict and violence by NSAG (32%) and communal clashes (15%)<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, Return Intention Surveys (RIS) conducted by DTM CAR found that a majority of IDPs (51% of IDPs living on displacement sites and 59% of IDPs living amongst host communities) reported the wish to remain in their displacement location, the reasons for which being overwhelmingly insecurity in the area of origin or relative security in the current location of displacement (86%). This indicates that while the situation has improved in 2019 and 2020, pockets of insecurity throughout the country continue to witness violence and volatility.

At the same time, over the same period, as security conditions stabilized in several parts of the country, the flow of returns expanded, with 150,133 additional returnees heading back to their location of origin, a growth of 16 per cent over the year. 70 per cent of Returnees indicated that the improvement in security conditions in the location of origin was the primary factor behind their returning home. The prefectures of Basse-Kotto (southern CAR), Ouham-Pende (western CAR) and Mbomou (south-east CAR), in particular, have grown increasingly stable and witness only infrequent security incidents. Together, they host over two-thirds (68%) of returnees.

The Central African Republic is a regional crisis, affecting several neighbouring countries. The spillover of the CAR crisis is reflected in the high number of refugees hosted in neighbor countries, primarily Cameroon (316,017 Refugees, or half of CAR Refugees), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (173,731, or 28 per cent of Refugees) and Chad (94,981, or 15 per cent of Refugees). Over the course of the year, the number of refugees grew by 8 per cent, up from 590,000 in January 2020.

<sup>57</sup> IOM Central African Republic, *Rapport sur les déplacements 11 (Décembre 2020)*, March 2021.





Map 4. Distribution of the internally displaced population in the Central African Republic, as of December 2020

## 2. REGIONAL CRISES

### NIGERIA (NORTH WEST/NORTH CENTRAL)

The crisis affecting Nigeria's North West and North Central geopolitical zones as well as the Maradi region in Niger, is a complex, multifaceted situation, interlocking historic ethno-social disparity; religious and communal antagonism pitting ethnic, religious and language-based communities; land-use contest; tensions between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers; territorial dispute; and banditry, grand larceny and criminal activity<sup>58</sup>. The crisis, which began in 2013, accelerated in 2018, with an intensification in attacks on civilian populations and violent conflicts. The increase in violence was largely the result of transhumant herders being driven south as a result of climate variability and growing scarcity of resources, as well as the expansion of farmland encroaching onto passages traditionally reserved to herds. These events, which begot growing competition over land and resources, heightened and were themselves exacerbated by other mutually reinforcing factors, including inter-community tensions and conflicts, the spread of violent extremism, cattle rustling, banditry and kidnappings, and climate induced disasters and resource degradation<sup>59</sup>. These factors combined into a perfect storm, leading to spiraling violence and mass displacements.

#### Evolution of crisis over reporting period

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	TREND 2019
NIGERIA	728,688	+26%
NIGER	18,636	+62%
TOTAL	747,324	+29%

Table 4. Number of IDPs in Nigeria's North West and North Central Zones and Niger's Maradi Region, as of December 2020 <sup>60</sup>

The crisis in North West and North Central stabilized in 2020. As of 31 December 2020 the crisis affecting the two regions affected a total of 824,526 individuals, including 747,526 IDPs (728,688 IDPs in Nigeria's North West and North Central Zones as well as 18,838 IDPs in Niger's Maradi Region) and 824,526 Refugees. While this represents an important increase of 29 per cent in the number of IDPs compared to the previous year (578,119 in December 2019), this growth should be attributed to the significant growth in geographic coverage of DTM assessments in Nigeria's North West and North Central Zones, which increased from 160 Local Government Areas (LGAs) to 172 LGAs. In actual fact, displacement plateaued, after a substantial growth in the number of IDPs in 2019 (DTM observed a 7% increase in IDP numbers between October and December 2019). Nevertheless, attacks, banditry and communal clashes continues throughout 2020, which saw the displacement of dozens of thousands of people, particularly in Katsina (the site of numerous attacks), whose displaced population grew by 98 per cent (60,016



#### NIGERIA

728,688 IDPs

+26% (2019-2020)

#### NIGER

18,636 IDPs

+62% (2019-2020)

#### TOTAL

747,324 IDPs

+29% (2019-2020)



**Displacement in  
Nigeria's North  
West/North Central  
plateaued in 2020**

<sup>58</sup> IOM Nigeria, *Displacement Tracking Matrix – North Central and North West Zones – Displacement Report 5*, January 2021.

<sup>59</sup> International Crisis Group, *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence*, July 2018.

<sup>60</sup> IOM Nigeria, *North West & North Central Displacement Report 5 (January 2021)*, March 2021 ; UNHCR Niger, *Population of Concern Map*, 31 December 2020.

individuals), and Benue, which saw an increase in inter-community conflicts and a rise in banditry and a subsequent 13 per cent per cent rise in the number of IDPs (increase of 23,935 individuals).

Notably, there was a shift in the areas most affected by violence. As of December 2020, the majority of IDPs (42%) resided in North Central Zone (309,231 individuals), and 58 per cent in North West Zone (419,457), compared to 65 per cent of IDPs who were in North Central Zone in 2019. The States hosting the largest number of IDPs were Benue (28%) and Plateau (12%) States.

Reasons for displacement of IDPs remained similar to previous years, with most displaced individuals (45%) displaced by community clashes and inter-community tensions, followed by banditry and kidnappings (30%). Close to 20 per cent of IDPs were also displaced by natural disasters, a result of severe floods and sandstorms which have increasingly been affecting the region over the years.

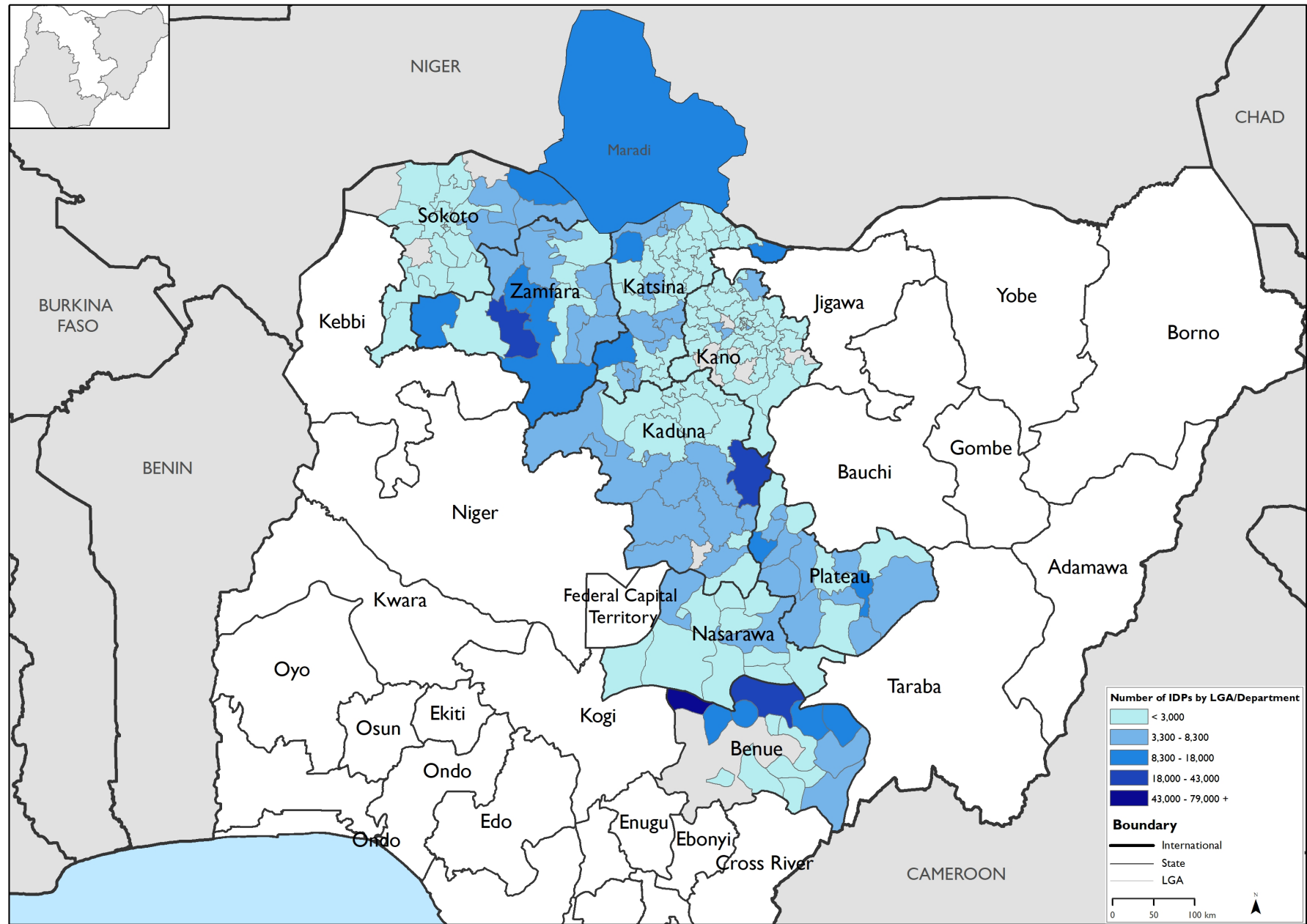
The crisis in the Middle Belt has also provoked the displacement of significant numbers of people to neighbouring Niger. Fearing attacks by armed groups, violent looting and communal clashes, dozens of thousands of Nigerians, many of them women and children, have sought refuge in Niger's Maradi Region<sup>61</sup>. As of 31 December 2020, 77,000 Nigerian Refugees had fled to Niger's Maradi Region, 23,000 of which fled in April 2020<sup>62</sup>, having been allowed to cross the border from Nigeria to Niger despite the closure of borders due to the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the violence has, since May 2019<sup>63</sup>, spilled over into Niger, where 18,636 individuals were internally displaced in the Maradi Region.

## The crisis spilled over into Niger in 2020

<sup>61</sup> UNHCR, "[Surging violence in Nigeria drives displacement to Niger](#)", 2 March 2021.

<sup>62</sup> UNHCR, "[Fleeing bandit attacks, Nigerian villagers seek safety in Niger](#)", 2 March 2021.

<sup>63</sup> UNHCR, « [Forte augmentation du nombre de déplacés dans la région de Maradi](#) », 16 April 2020.



Map 5. Distribution of the internally displaced population in Nigeria's North West and North Central Zones and Niger's Maradi Region, as of December 2020

**TOTAL**

711,056 IDPs

+33% (2019-2020)



**The number of IDPs displaced by Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis grew by 33% in 2020**

## 2. REGIONAL CRISES

### CAMEROON (NORTH WEST/SOUTH WEST)

The North West and South West regions of Cameroon have been in the grips of a crisis, known as the Anglophone Crisis since 2016, when demonstrators protested the marginalization of the Anglophone community and the growing influence of the French system and language in English-speaking regions of Cameroon. This disaffection finds its roots in post-independence Cameroon: following a referendum in 1961, the English-speaking South West and North West Regions were united with majority French-speaking Cameroon, favoured over unification with Nigeria. Since then, and particularly since the shift from a federal to a centralized system in 1972, disaffection and hostility mounted, with English-speaking Cameroonians (20% of the population) perceiving themselves as second-class citizens and anger growing over what they saw as marginalization by the French-speaking authorities<sup>64</sup>. The peaceful protests of 2016 soon evolved into a low-scaled insurgency, with separatists calling for the independence of the English-speaking regions. By 2017, violence spread to the entire regions and the crisis evolved into a full-fledged armed conflict between separatists and Cameroonian forces. The conflict sharply escalated over the years, spurring the displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals and killing thousands of people.

#### Evolution of crisis over reporting period

COUNTRY	INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT FIGURE	TREND 2019
CAMEROON	711,056	+33%

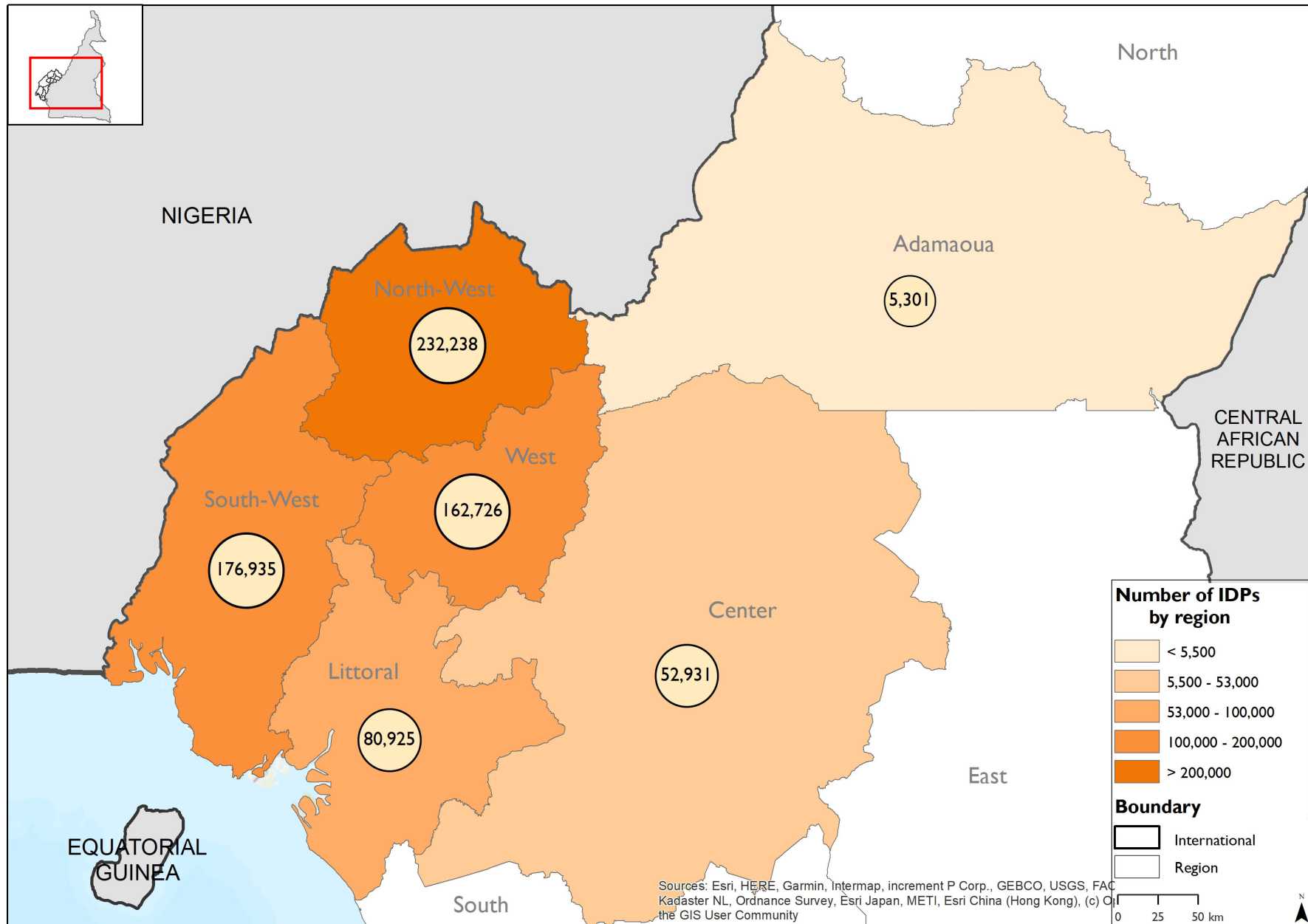
*Table 5. Number of IDPs displaced by Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis (North West and South West Regions), as of December 2020<sup>65</sup>*

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of 31 December 2020, 711,056 IDPs (present in the North West, South West, Littoral, West, Center and Adamaoua regions), 342,628 Former IDP Returnees, 18,279 Returnees from abroad and 63,697 Refugees in neighbouring Nigeria were displaced by the crisis in Cameroon's Anglophone regions.

Over the course of the year, the number of IDPs grew by 33 per cent (up from 536,107 IDPs in December 2019). The number of Returnees, meanwhile, grew at a faster pace, witnessing a growth of 52 per cent during the year (up from 237,349). This growth is at least partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic: as the government adopted preventive measures to limit the spread of the virus, including the shutdown of businesses and school closures, large numbers of IDPs and Refugees returned to their location of origin from displacement locations in the West, Littoral and Centre Regions of Cameroon and Cross River State in Nigeria. 25,000 IDPs thus returned to their location of origin during the COVID-19 crisis. However, most returned to their location of displacement once classes resumed and businesses reopened.

<sup>64</sup> International Crisis Group, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*, August 2017.

<sup>65</sup> UNHCR Cameroon, *Statistiques des personnes relevant de la compétence du HCR*, 31 December 2020.



Map 6. Distribution of the internally displaced population displaced by Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis (North West and South West Regions), as of December 2020



# MIGRATION

MOBILITY TRENDS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

# MIGRATION

West and Central Africa is a region of high mobility and intricate networks of migration flows. Migration is historically, culturally and sociologically rooted in the region, and is one of its defining characteristics<sup>66</sup>. Migration both internal and inter-regional is a long-standing tradition in the region<sup>67</sup>. West and Central Africa hosts the largest stock of migrants in the whole African continent (9.5 million migrants): an estimated 3 per cent of the region's population are international migrants<sup>68</sup>.

Regional mobility is primarily intra-regional<sup>69</sup>, and with the presence of several political, economic and cultural hubs, West and Central Africa witnesses large internal flows involving labour migrants, seasonal and circular movements, movements of students and family reunification<sup>70</sup>. These movements are facilitated by visa-free movement within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC)<sup>71</sup> as well as strong networks among ethnic groups.

Strategically situated at the crossroads of Southern Africa, Northern Africa, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Ocean and the Horn of Africa, West and Central Africa is also witness to large inter-regional movements. While mobility trends and migration routes taken by migrants trends constantly evolve according to shifts in national policies, economic opportunities and migration controls, the routes themselves remain relatively stable over time. Regional mobility mainly takes place along one main east–west axis and is then distributed north- and southwards through ancillary routes.

In 2020, one event fundamentally shaped mobility and altered the migration landscape in West and Central Africa: the COVID-19 pandemic. Fear of contamination, mobility restrictions and border closures, the economic downturn provoked by the crisis and the shutdown of businesses and public spaces had deep and lasting impacts on mobility flows as well as migrants themselves. IOM data showed that intra-regional migration flows dropped by 69 per cent between March and April 2020, coinciding with the period during which countries in the region started adopting travel bans and restrictions and enacting border closure measures<sup>72</sup>.



**West and Central Africa hosts 9.5 million international migrants, the largest migrant stock in Africa**

**The COVID-19 crisis fundamentally shaped regional mobility in 2020**

<sup>66</sup> Robin, Nelly, « Migrations en Afrique de l'Ouest, une longue histoire », in *Grain de Sel*, No. 40, November 2007.

<sup>67</sup> OECD, *Identifying the factors driving West African migration*, West African Papers No. 17, July 2018.

<sup>68</sup> RFI, *Les migrations en Afrique de l'Ouest*, 2019..

<sup>69</sup> An estimated 90% of migration flows are internal to the region. See IOM WCA, *Regional Mobility Mapping*, June 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Charriere, Floriane and Fresia, Marion, *L'Afrique de l'Ouest comme espace migratoire*, 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Economic Community of Central African States, *Free Movement of Persons*

<sup>72</sup> IOM WCA, *COVID-19 — Regional Flow Monitoring Report*, December 2020.





Map 7. Main migration routes in West and Central Africa<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> IOM WCA, *Regional Mobility Mapping*, June 2020



**As of 31 December 2020, there were 343,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases, representing 0.3% of worldwide cases and 11% of cases in Africa**

## 1. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIXED MIGRATION FLOWS

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been described as a once-in-a-lifetime global health crisis and the greatest challenge faced by the world since World War II<sup>74</sup>. The epidemic began in December 2019, when a new, previously unknown virus, subsequently referred to as Sars-Cov-2. The virus rapidly spread to all corners of the world, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a pandemic on 11 March 2020 and creating one of the worst epidemiological crises in a hundred years. As of 31 December 2020, there were over 90 million confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide, including close to 2 million deaths, according to the WHO<sup>75</sup>.

At that same date, West and Central Africa (WCA) recorded 343,000 confirmed cases, representing 0.3 per cent of worldwide cases and 11 per cent of cases in Africa; in addition, 4,794 deaths linked to the coronavirus were officially reported in WCA, or 0.2 per cent of worldwide deaths and 6 per cent of deaths in Africa<sup>76</sup>.

Beyond the medical and sanitary crisis wrought by the pandemic, it has also engendered an unprecedented worldwide social, economic, political, cultural and demographic crisis: as countries around the world brought their economies and activities to a standstill to prevent and fight the spread of COVID-19, imposing measures such as the shutdown of businesses, schools, restaurants and cultural spaces, the prohibition of gatherings and closure of public spaces, the socio-economic fallout cut deep and wide, and was linked to an increase in inequalities and growing fragility of the most vulnerable populations<sup>77</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> UNDP, *The COVID-19 pandemic* [online] accessed 13 December 2020.

<sup>75</sup> WHO, *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard* [online], accessed 5 January 2020.

<sup>76</sup> These figures should be considered with caution: confirmed cases and reported deaths may be largely underreported and may not reflect the true scale of cases and deaths linked to COVID-19.

<sup>77</sup> *The Economist*, "The plague year", 19 December 2020 – 1 January 2021; The World Bank, "2020 Year in Review: The Impact of COVID-19", 14 December 2020.



**45% of all Points of Entry in West and Central Africa were still fully closed as of 31 December 2020**

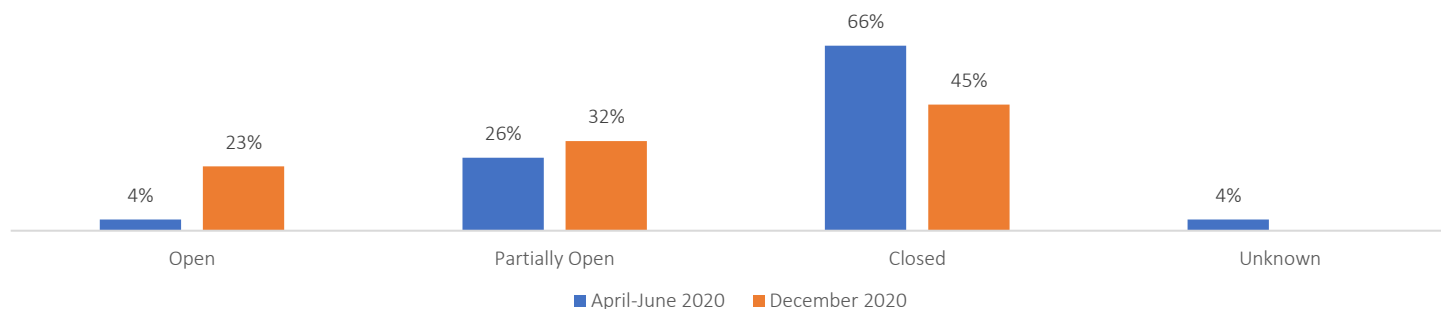


**The COVID-19 crisis led to increased securitization of borders**

## MOBILITY RESTRICTION MEASURES

To combat the spread of COVID-19, countries took to impose strict restrictions on mobility soon after cases were first identified in the region in March 2020. Measures included: the closure of maritime, air and land borders; restrictions on internal mobility; curfews, lockdowns and quarantining of cities or regions; states of emergencies; and mandatory isolation of travellers. A DTM assessment conducted between April and June 2020 found that, of the more than 350 Points of Entry (PoEs) evaluated throughout the West and Central Africa region, 66 per cent<sup>78</sup> were completely shut off to all traffic, while 26 per cent were partially open, only allowing the passage of freight transport, returning nationals or humanitarian flights and convoys. Only 4 per cent of PoEs were fully open to travellers<sup>79</sup>.

Governments began easing and lifting measures from July 2020 onwards, most notably easing restrictions in internal travel and reopening airports. As of December 2020, the number of PoEs fully open to traffic had grown to 23 per cent of assessed PoEs, while 32 per cent were partially open. Nevertheless, most land borders were still officially closed, and some countries continued to impose restrictions on air travel<sup>80</sup>. Almost half of assessed PoEs (45%) thus remained fully closed as of 31 December 2020.



**Figure 3. Operational status of Points of Entry across West and Central Africa in April-May 2020 and December 2020<sup>81</sup>**

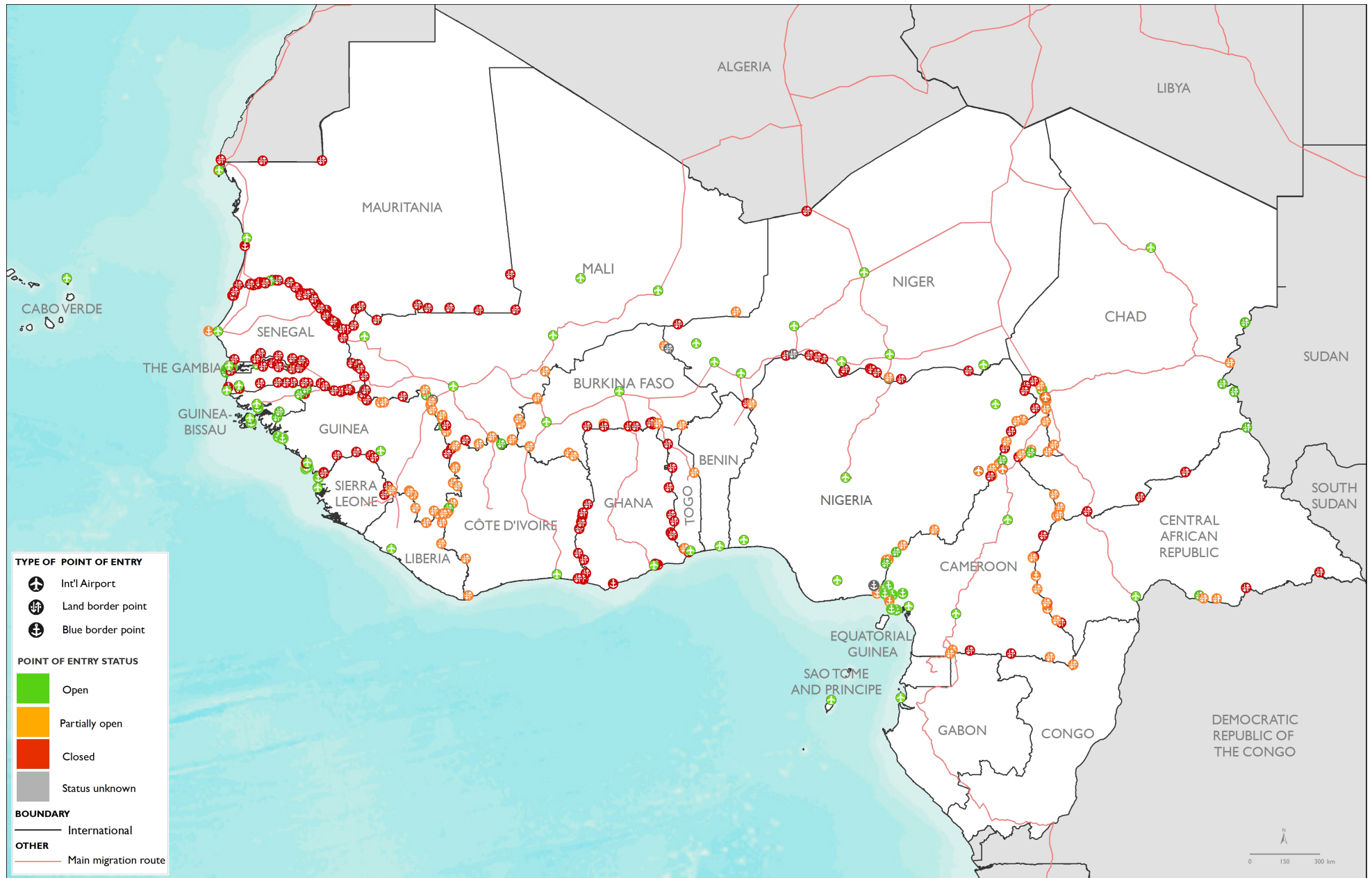
The enforcement of mobility restriction measures was exemplified by the increased securitization of borders, with more frequent patrols, greater border surveillance and increased numbers of border control agents to prevent irregular border crossings. In addition, countries in the region tightened their visa regimes by including additional requirements to obtain visas. These restrictions, along with reduced travel linked to fear of contagion and limited opportunities to travel, had significant impacts in mobility in the region.

<sup>78</sup> Including 35 airports, 29 blue border points and 288 land border points.

<sup>79</sup> IOM, *Restrictions de mobilité liées au COVID-19 au sein de la CEDEAO*, July 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Assessments conducted in December 2020 found that 44 per cent of Points of Entry in the region continued to be completely closed off to traffic. Moreover, as a second wave hit West and Central Africa, some countries re-implemented partial restrictive measures, including curfews, lockdowns and the closure of public spaces.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>81</sup> IOM WCA, *COVID-19 : Impact on Mobility Report (April 2020)*, June 2020; IOM WCA, *COVID-19: Regional Flow Monitoring Report (December 2020)*, February 2021.



Map 8. Operational status of Points of Entry in West and Central Africa, December 2020

## MOBILITY FLOWS

Travel disruptions, restrictions and bans in West and Central Africa, in conjunction with other measures taken by governments to stem the spread of COVID-19, resulted in significant shifts in mobility across the region<sup>82</sup> and significantly curtailed regional migration flows.

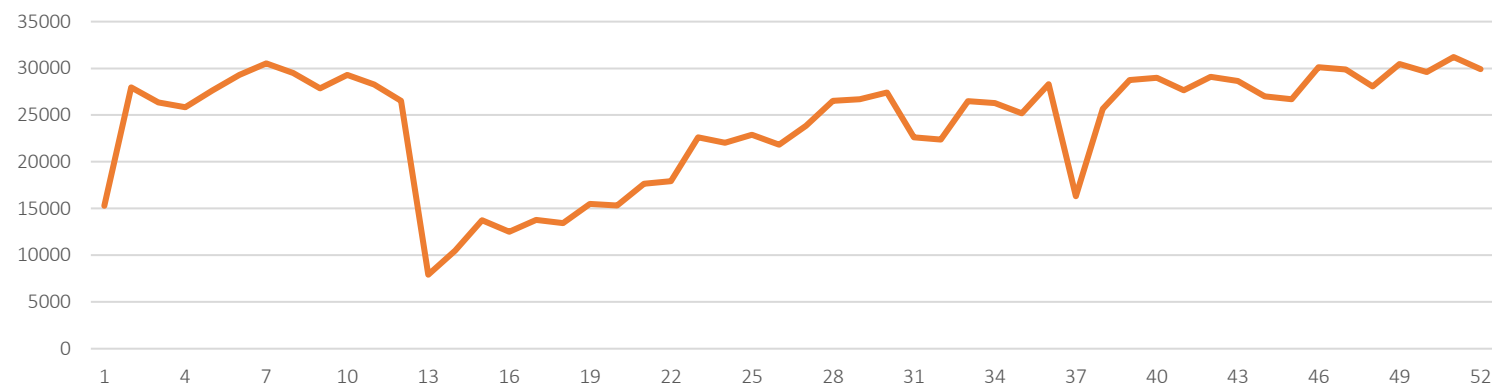


Figure 4. Weekly number of travellers recorded at IOM's Flow Monitoring Points in 2020<sup>83</sup>

Mobility trends for 2020 in the region, as recorded at Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) in Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, can be broken down into four distinct periods:

- Between January and March 2020, mobility throughout the region was stable, and in fact witnessed higher levels when compared to the same period in 2019 (the number of recorded movements was 18% higher in 2020 than in 2019). However, from mid-March onwards, shortly after the first COVID-19 cases were identified in West and Central Africa and governments began closing their borders and restricting internal and cross-border mobility, migration flows saw a sudden, stark decrease, as it became more challenging to travel, or migrants delayed travel: numbers of observed movements thus saw a striking 46 per cent drop between the first and second half of the month of March 2021.
- Between April and June 2020, with the strict enforcement of mobility restriction measures, migration flows in the region dropped precipitously, reaching levels 30 per cent lower than those observed in 2019. From January to May 2020, observed movements decreased by 40 per cent. However, flows witnessed significant shifts within that period: in April 2020, migration flows were 50 per cent lower than in April 2019. Mobility flows soon bounced back, with the number of observed movements growing substantially in May and June (by 29% and 30% compared with the previous month in 2020, respectively), a growth primarily attributed to increased

Between April and June 2020, migration flows in the region dropped precipitously, reaching levels 30% lower than in 2019

<sup>82</sup> IOM WCA, *COVID-19 — Regional Flow Monitoring Report*, December 2020

<sup>83</sup> IOM WCA, *COVID-19: Regional Flow Monitoring Report (December 2020)*, February 2021.



**Regional migration flows reached 2019 levels by September, and between October and December, flows were 32% higher than 2019**

internal travel following the progressive end of restrictions in inter-regional mobility in June 2020<sup>84</sup>. Furthermore, humanitarian corridors were set up throughout the region to allow stranded migrants to return home, playing a role in the increase in recorded flows<sup>85</sup>. In addition, while many border points were not yet open, migrants adopted alternative practices (such as crossing at unofficial border points, finding alternative routes, or relying more heavily on smugglers) to circumvent official Points of Entry and avoid controls (See [section Finding the Way](#)).

- From July to September 2020, migration flows increased by fits and starts, reaching 2019 levels by September. This coincided with the period during which most airports reopened to commercial flights. While land and maritime borders remained closed, recorded increases in cross-border movements point to a relative easing in controls at land and blue border points. Increases in flows during that period also coincided with the movements of large numbers of seasonal labourers to agricultural areas throughout the Sahel region and of students for the start of the academic year.
- In the final quarter of the year from October to December 2020, flows increased, reaching levels 32 per cent higher than the same period in 2019, as travellers carried out travel which they had postponed because of the pandemic. The rainy season also attracted large numbers of seasonal migrants across the region.

The evolution of mobility trends in West and Central Africa had a direct impact on travel between West and Central Africa and other regions, most notably North Africa, and beyond. The reduction in regional flows between March and April 2020 was thus reflected in a decline in movements from Mali, Niger and Chad to North African countries as well as a decrease in the number of sea arrivals to continental Europe, while the increase in flows observed from May 2020 onwards coincided with large increases in the number of travellers going to North Africa and the number of irregular migrant arrivals to Europe (see sections [Movements between West and Central Africa and North Africa](#) and [Movements from West and Central Africa to Europe](#)). A similar trend was also observed in return migration, as the number of migrants who benefited from Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) espoused regional mobility flow trends (see section [Voluntary return in the age of COVID-19](#)).

While migration flows saw steep drops throughout the region in 2020, they never came to a full stop<sup>86</sup>. Even at the peak of mobility restrictions and disruption to travel, Flow Monitoring activities continued to register transboundary as well as internal movements<sup>87</sup>, and anecdotal evidence points to the fact that migrants continued to cross borders despite the closure of frontiers by every country in the region. Extensive, porous borders make them more difficult to monitor, allowing travellers to cross borders without detection. Nevertheless, border closures and increased controls made it harder to travel between countries, presumably generated informal border checks and other dishonest practices

<sup>84</sup> Schoeberger, Irene and Rango, Marzia, “COVID-19 and migration in West and Central Africa and across the Mediterranean”, in IOM, *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean: Trends, risks, development and governance*, 2020.

<sup>85</sup> IOM was a key actor in the setup of humanitarian corridors, for example contributing to the implementation of a humanitarian corridor up between Burkina Faso and Niger, allowing for the return of thousands of Nigerien migrants stranded in Burkina Faso to their home country (see IOM Burkina Faso, *COVID-19 — Suivi des urgences 4 (11—24 Avril 2020)*, 19 April 2020.

<sup>86</sup> *Le Monde*, « En Côte d’Ivoire, travailleurs et commerçants se jouent de la fermeture des frontières », 1 June 2020.

<sup>87</sup> IOM WCA, *Regional Flow Monitoring Report (January – April 2020)*, May 2020.



**Despite border closures, migration flows never came to a full stop, and large movements were observed throughout the region**

and forced a greater proportion of movements into irregularity. As a result, migrants took to cross through unofficial crossing points, circumventing regular border crossing points<sup>88</sup> and adopting alternative, and sometimes more hazardous and perilous, routes to evade control, often with the help of smugglers.

Large movements linked to the fear of contagion or as a consequence of measures imposed by governments were thus observed throughout the region<sup>89</sup>. In Burkina Faso, for instance, DTM Flow Monitoring activities observed 8,231 movements on average crossing the borders through unofficial border posts between May and August 2020. In Cameroon, over 25,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) left their location of displacement and returned to their locations of origin in the conflict-affected North West and South West regions. These movements were borne out of the fear of COVID-19 and as a result of the authorities' decision to close schools to fight the spread of the coronavirus. The crisis also led to the return of thousands of migrants (*talibe* migrants returning to Niger's Zinder region from Nigeria after schools were closed and gatherings banned<sup>90</sup>, seasonal workers returning from Algeria to Niger<sup>91</sup>) to their countries of origin.

In addition, several governments gave permission to flights carrying humanitarian aid workers, while a number of countries, including Niger and The Gambia, approved the opening of humanitarian corridors to allow third-country nationals to return to their home countries and their own nationals to return safely<sup>92</sup>. Others reached temporary agreements: Chad and Cameroon signed an agreement<sup>93</sup> allowing thousands of Chadian students to travel to Cameroon to take the *baccalauréat*<sup>94</sup>. As early as March 2020, countries in the region additionally set up repatriation flights, primarily to and from countries outside the region (Europe, Asia, North America), to allow foreign nationals to return to their home countries and enable their own citizens stranded abroad to return home.



**50,000 migrants are estimated to have been stranded due to the COVID-19 crisis**

## ALTERNATIVE MOBILITY ROUTES AND PATTERNS

Restrictions on mobility and border closures profoundly disrupted travel in West and Central Africa and has left dozens of thousands of migrants stranded throughout the region. With border closures, strengthened controls, counter-smuggling measures, and community-led restrictions in access induced by the COVID-19 crisis, cross-border transit became much more difficult<sup>95</sup>. Sixty per cent of migrants interviewed by the Mixed Migration Centre said they were stranded in the country in which interviews were conducted<sup>96</sup>. According to IOM, over 50,000 migrants are estimated to have been stranded in a country other than their country of origin or habitual residence, unable to continue their travels and

<sup>88</sup> IOM Burkina Faso, *Suivi des urgences – COVID-19 n°9 (6-12 juillet 2020)*, 15 July 2020.

<sup>89</sup> IMREF, *Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on the Vulnerabilities of Migrants on the Central Mediterranean Route*, July 2020.

<sup>90</sup> IOM Niger, *Suivi des urgences- COVID-19 2 (27 mars – 21 avril 2020)*, 27 April 2020.

<sup>91</sup> IOM Niger, *Suivi des urgences- COVID-19 1 (19 mars – 18 avril 2020)*, 22 April 2020.

<sup>92</sup> Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Report: West Africa, Quarter 3 2020*, July 2020.

<sup>93</sup> OCHA, *Rapport de situation No. 2 : Cameroun Extrême-Nord (Août 2020)*, September 2020.

<sup>94</sup> IOM Cameroon, *Rapport sur le suivi des flux de populations*, September 2020.

<sup>95</sup> IMREF, *Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on the Vulnerabilities of Migrants on the Central Mediterranean Route*, July 2020.

<sup>96</sup> Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Report: West Africa, Quarter 1 2020*, April 2020.

## Mobility restrictions drove migrants to find alternative routes and methods

## Smuggling activities quickly adapted and grew during the COVID-19 pandemic

prevented from returning home<sup>97</sup>. Stranded migrants included students; labour and seasonal migrants<sup>98</sup>; transhumant herders<sup>99</sup>; and over 3,000 migrant beneficiaries of Assistance to Voluntary Return and Reintegration in transit centres and other reception centres (See section [Voluntary return in the age of COVID-19](#))<sup>100</sup>.

Stranded migrants are more likely to present heightened vulnerabilities and to live in precarious conditions. They are at greater risk of being impacted by the socioeconomic effects of the crisis, of facing discrimination in access to housing and basic services and of falling prey to abuse and exploitation. Migrants stranded in transit centres, which operated over capacity, or required to undergo lengthy mandatory quarantines in sometimes unsanitary facilities become growingly frustrated at the prospects of not being able to go home or continue their journey. This has generated significant tensions, dissatisfaction and stress<sup>101</sup>, in addition to heightening the sanitary risks faced by migrants.

As a result, many migrants searched for new ways to cross borders while avoiding control and detection. A little under half of migrants interviewed by MMC (43%) indicated that they planned on continuing onwards with their journey<sup>102</sup>. This led migrants to circumvent official Points of Entry (PoEs) and cross through unofficial crossing points, thus driving a greater proportion of continuing movements into irregularity (see Section [Impact of COVID-19 on migration flows](#)). This presumably occasioned informal border checks and dishonest practices, particularly at unregistered PoEs, reportedly took advantage of the closure of borders to conduct increased from smugglers and migrants<sup>103</sup>. In addition, with migrants avoiding official PoEs and crossing borders through informal PoEs, where few health screenings of travellers were carried out, national authorities' capacity to effectively implement measures to fight and prevent the spread of COVID-19 was undermined.

Whilst strict mobility restriction measures contributed to a temporary halt in smuggling activities, continued demand for mobility meant that migrant smuggling quickly restarted<sup>104</sup>. Smugglers also changed their routes in response to border closures, which might partly explain the revival of the West African Atlantic Route (See section [Reopening of the West African Atlantic Route to the Canary Islands](#)). Smuggling networks in fact grew as migrants relied more heavily on smugglers to travel<sup>105</sup>. Taking advantage of this renewed reliance on smuggling and to offset the increased risks of detection, smugglers have charged significantly higher fees<sup>106</sup>. Reinforced border controls prompted smuggling networks to develop alternative smuggling routes, often more isolated, harsher and more perilous<sup>107</sup> and rely on more dangerous logistics<sup>108</sup>, increasing the

<sup>97</sup> IOM figures. These numbers, which were collected through alerts sent by IOM field teams, are probably under-counted.

<sup>98</sup> In one particular instance, close to 2,000 Nigerien migrants working in gold mines in Burkina Faso were stuck, unable to return home.

<sup>99</sup> IOM Mauritania, *Suivi des urgences – COVID-19 (15 mars – 8 avril 2020)*, 16 April 2020.

<sup>100</sup> IOM West and Central Africa, *COVID-19 Response Situation Report 6*, 4 May 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Report: West Africa, Quarter 1 2020*, April 2020.

<sup>103</sup> GIATOC, *Smuggling in the time of COVID-19: The impact of the pandemic on human-smuggling dynamics and migrant-protection risks*, April 2020.

<sup>104</sup> Sanchez, Gabriella and Achilli, Luigi, "Stranded: The Impacts of COVID-19 on Irregular Migration and Migrant Smuggling", *MPC Policy Brief, Issue 2020/20*, May 2020.

<sup>105</sup> UNODC, *How COVID-19 restrictions and the economic consequences are likely to impact migrant smuggling and cross-border trafficking in persons to Europe and North America*, Research Brief, September 2020.

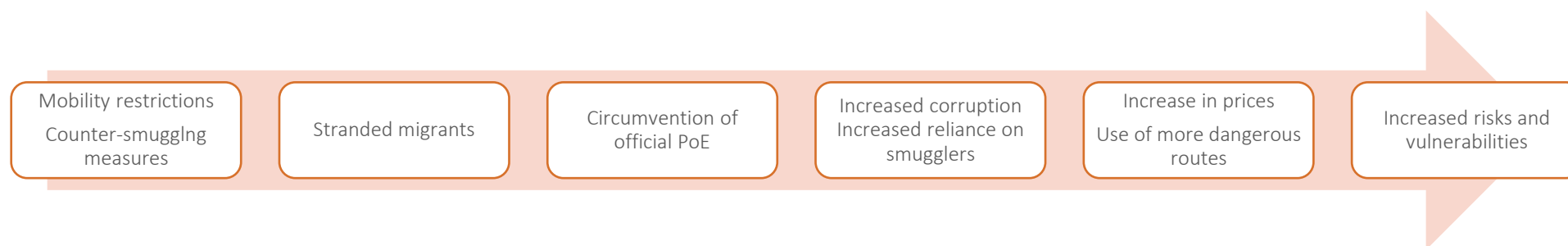
<sup>106</sup> Mixed Migration Centre, *West Africa Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Quarter 2 2020*, July 2020; IMREF, *Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on the Vulnerabilities of Migrants on the Central Mediterranean Route*, July 2020; GIATOC, *Smuggling in the time of COVID-19: The impact of the pandemic on human-smuggling dynamics and migrant-protection risks*, April 2020.

<sup>107</sup> UNODC, "Impact of COVID-19 on migrants smuggling", 10 September 2020.

<sup>108</sup> GIATOC, *Smuggling in the time of COVID-19: The impact of the pandemic on human-smuggling dynamics and migrant-protection risks*, April 2020.



vulnerabilities and risk exposure of migrants. This finding is corroborated by the number of migrants rescued by IOM in the Nigerien desert in 2020 (433), which is 1.6 times greater than the whole of 2019 (See section [Risks and challenges in migration to North Africa and Europe](#))<sup>109</sup>.



**Figure 5. Impact of COVID-19 mobility restriction measures on traveller mobility in West and Central Africa**

**47% of travellers faced additional challenges because of the COVID-19 crisis**

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANTS’ LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

The COVID-19 crisis had significant, adverse impacts on migrants’ livelihoods and access to services. A significant share of travellers (47%) interviewed by IOM throughout West and Central Africa indicated having experienced challenges because of the pandemic.

CHALLENGES	% OF RESPONDENTS
No challenge	53%
Difficult continuing economic activities	26%
Accessing PPE	14%
Access to basic services	12%
Quality of food worsened	9%
Difficulty sending or receiving remittance	8%
Difficulty accessing health services	7%
Diagnosed with COVID-19 but recovered	4%
Acquaintance contracted COVID but recovered	4%
Discrimination	3%
Acquaintance have died of COVID	3%

**Table 6. Challenges encountered by travellers in West and Central Africa since the start of the COVID-19 crisis<sup>110, 111</sup>**

<sup>109</sup> IOM Niger, *Humanitarian Rescue Operations and Search and Rescue Operations Factsheet*, December 2020.

<sup>110</sup> Multiple answers possible, except if “No challenge”

<sup>111</sup> IOM WCA, *Migration and COVID-19 in West and Central Africa: Examining the Impacts of COVID-19 on Travellers Across the Region (July – September 2020)*, January 2021.



**21% of migrants surveyed in Mauritania lost their job and 45% had to stop working temporarily**

**The COVID-19 crisis led to steep reductions in remittances**

#### *Livelihoods and income*

The first way by which the crisis impacted migrants was by the loss of income and the inability to continue income generating activities because of reduced livelihood opportunities and the closure of businesses. Migrant workers are particularly exposed to income losses as they work in the sectors most affected by the restrictive measures, including restaurants, hotels, retail and wholesale, tourism, transportation and construction. 26 per cent of migrants interviewed by IOM throughout West and Central Africa reported having faced difficulties in continuing their economic activities. Similarly, a pilot survey conducted by DTM in Nouakchott (Mauritania) found that 21 per cent of surveyed migrants had lost their jobs due to the pandemic while 45 per cent had to stop working temporarily. In addition, over half of the migrants (52%) said that their income has decreased since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis<sup>112</sup>.

Further, with mobility restrictions hindering internal and cross-boundary movements and trade, migrants unable to cross borders for seasonal movements (agropastoral movements, labour migration to mining sites or agricultural lands) or for business reasons (re-stocking, sale and purchase of goods) experienced substantial opportunity costs. Communities in border areas or other transit hubs that rely on the passage of people and goods also lost significant trade and income vital to their livelihood<sup>113</sup>. Many migrants rely on (often informal) work in transit countries to pay for their journey (pay-as-you-go schemes), and were twice hit by the crisis: as economies shut down, migrants lost their access to financial resources; and as migrants became stranded because of border closures, they were obliged to pay for unplanned extended stays in transit countries not factored into their initial budgets, and without access to livelihood opportunities to finance the extended layover<sup>114</sup>.

Loss of income and drop in activity in all sectors, both by migrants and their relatives and friends in their home communities, led to a reduction in remittances sent and received by migrants. Migrants surveyed by IOM who were facing difficulties sending or receiving remittances reported that the main challenge was the closure of borders preventing them from sending or receiving money via friends or couriers (63%). The second issue related to sending or receiving remittances was the loss of income (either from the respondent or family and friends), which precluded the ability to send or receive additional funds (36%). Remittances in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) could drop to USD 25.9 billion in 2020, its lowest level in ten years<sup>115</sup>. Migrant remittances being an important source of income in many countries in the region<sup>116</sup>, this may have repercussions on the well-being of individuals and households and on the development of wider economies<sup>117</sup>.

#### *Access to goods and services, increased risks and discrimination*

The loss of remittances and income resulting from the COVID-19 crisis also affected migrants' ability to access services. Indeed, loss of income as well as increased costs has made it harder for migrants in the region to afford food, shelter, education and other basic goods<sup>118</sup>. The crisis

<sup>112</sup> IOM Mauritania, *Nouakchott — Enquête pilote OIM-ONS sur les profils des migrants (13—16 décembre 2020)*, February 2021.

<sup>113</sup> Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Report: West Africa, Quarter 2 2020*, July 2020.

<sup>114</sup> ILO, *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work, Third edition*, 28 April 2020.

<sup>115</sup> ECOWAS, *Covid-19 Pandemic: Impact of Restriction Measures in West Africa*, December 2020.

<sup>116</sup> In 2019, these transfers amounted to \$ 33.7 billion for ECOWAS as a whole, or nearly 5% of the regional GDP.

<sup>117</sup> Guadagno, Lorenzo, *"Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An initial analysis"*, IOM Migration Research Series No. 60, 2020.

<sup>118</sup> IMREF, *Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on the Vulnerabilities of Migrants on the Central Mediterranean Route*, July 2020.



**51% of migrants could no longer afford food of adequate quality as a result of decreased income or remittances**

exacerbated migrants' personal, social, situational and structural vulnerabilities and thereby impacted migrants' access to goods and services<sup>119</sup>. Half of migrants interviewed by MMC (49%) mentioned increased costs as barriers to access healthcare<sup>120</sup>, while half of respondents surveyed by IOM who were facing challenges in sending or receiving remittance (51%) indicated that they could no longer afford food of adequate quality due to decreased incomes<sup>121</sup>. Other reported not being able to pay for education fees (39%) and not being able to afford rent or mortgages (38%). The impact of the COVID-19 crisis is confirmed by a survey conducted by DTM Mauritania, which found that the share of respondents who faced difficulty finding food went from 27 per cent prior to the pandemic to 63 per cent at the time of the survey<sup>122</sup>.

IMPACTS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Can no longer afford good food	51%
Can no longer afford paying for education	39%
Can no longer pay for our house	38%
Can no longer repay our loan	28%
Can no longer pay for stocks	23%
Can no longer sustain our business	18%

**Table 7. Impact of decreased remittances resulting from the COVID-19 crisis on migrants in West and Central Africa<sup>123</sup>**

Forced into idleness, the number of stationary migrants expanded, increasing the density of the already overcrowded and unhygienic buildings and neighbourhoods in which migrants in the region often live. This situation made it significantly more difficult to adhere to social distancing and other preventive measures such as frequent handwashing<sup>124</sup> and amplified health risks of migrants, including contracting infections<sup>125</sup>. This was particularly striking in transit centres, which operated above capacity, and where migrants were forced to stay for long periods of time because of the suspension of assisted voluntary return programs<sup>126</sup>; and in displacement sites, where IDPs, already facing increased vulnerabilities and risks, faced intensified health hazards<sup>127</sup>.

Adding to this, pre-existing vulnerabilities, including fear of deportation and detention; limited entitlement to services; lack of access to facilities; and limited awareness of rights were exacerbated by the crisis, further restricting migrants' access to services and support<sup>128</sup>. The fear of deportation, insufficient information and legal status were mentioned by 19 per cent, 17 per cent and 12 per cent of migrants surveyed by

<sup>119</sup> IOM, *Migration Factsheet No. 6: The impact of COVID-19 on migrants*, 2020.

<sup>120</sup> Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Report: West Africa, Quarter 3 2020*, July 2020.

<sup>121</sup> IOM WCA, *Migration and COVID-19 in West and Central Africa: Examining the Impacts of COVID-19 on Travellers Across the Region (July – September 2020)*, January 2021.

<sup>122</sup> IOM Mauritania, *Nouakchott – Enquête pilote OIM-ONS sur les profils des migrants (13–16 décembre 2020)*, February 2021.

<sup>123</sup> IOM WCA, *Migration and COVID-19 in West and Central Africa: Examining the Impacts of COVID-19 on Travellers Across the Region (July – September 2020)*, January 2021.

<sup>124</sup> Guadagno, Lorenzo, "Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An initial analysis", *IOM Migration Research Series No. 60*, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Liem, A., C. Wang, Y. Wariyanti, C.A. Latkin and B.J. Hall, "The neglected health of international migrant workers in the COVID-19 epidemic", in *The Lancet*, 2020.

<sup>126</sup> IOM West and Central Africa, *COVID-19 Response Situation Report #6*, 4 May 2020.

<sup>127</sup> IOM West and Central Africa, *COVID-19 Response Situation Report #8*, 4 June 2020.

<sup>128</sup> Guadagno, Lorenzo, "Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An initial analysis", *IOM Migration Research Series No. 60*, 2020.

## The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated stigma, discrimination and exclusion of migrants

## The economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis may lead to future emigration

MMC as barriers to access healthcare. In addition, support systems and assistance programs were heavily impacted by mobility restrictions and reallocation of resources to COVID-19 response programmes, limiting their ability to provide assistance to migrants<sup>129</sup>.

The COVID-19 crisis additionally amplified the risks of exploitation and abuse faced by migrants. Increased dependence on smuggling networks, loss of income and limited livelihood opportunities, forced idleness and the inability to follow social distancing measures led to a higher risk of labour and sexual exploitation and abuse at the hands of authorities<sup>130</sup>. Migrants also faced heightened vulnerability to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). Migrants interviewed by MMC reported being more vulnerable to labour (55%) and sexual exploitation (50%) as a result of the COVID-19 crisis<sup>131</sup>.

Despite border closures, restricted mobility and the shutdown of economies, some countries continued to enforce immigration requirements, such as conditions for visa renewal or status determination, leading to many migrants to violate their requirements. This situation increased their risks of detention and deportation and further limited their access to basic services and protection. It should be noted that other countries, taking into account the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis, actually made immigration policy more flexible<sup>132</sup>.

Finally, the crisis led to increasing hostility against migrants, accused of importing or spreading COVID-19. This induced increased xenophobic attacks against migrant communities. The crisis exacerbated pre-existing grievances, stigmas and prejudice and led to increased violence and exclusion, discriminatory service provision and arbitrary measures against migrants<sup>133</sup>. Exclusion and marginalization may prevent migrants, particularly those in irregular situations, to report health conditions and access needed treatment. Migrants who have recently returned home may also be subject to stigma and discrimination and face similar challenges, as well as interruptions to planned reintegration support<sup>134</sup>.

### *Impact on future migration*

This discrimination and negative impact on school enrolment, access to basic goods and businesses could deepen poverty and inequalities and lead to further increases in migration movement. Indeed, the economic impact of COVID-19 has already generated further emigration. A vast majority of migrants surveyed by MMC for whom the crisis was a factor in their decision to migrate (84%) mentioned the economic impact of the crisis as the primary reason for travel<sup>135</sup>.

<sup>129</sup> IOM, *Migration Factsheet No. 6: The impact of COVID-19 on migrants*, 2020; GIATOC, *Smuggling in the time of COVID-19: The impact of the pandemic on human-smuggling dynamics and migrant-protection risks*, April 2020.

<sup>130</sup> GIATOC, *Smuggling in the time of COVID-19: The impact of the pandemic on human-smuggling dynamics and migrant-protection risks*, April 2020; IMREF, *Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on the Vulnerabilities of Migrants on the Central Mediterranean Route*, July 2020.

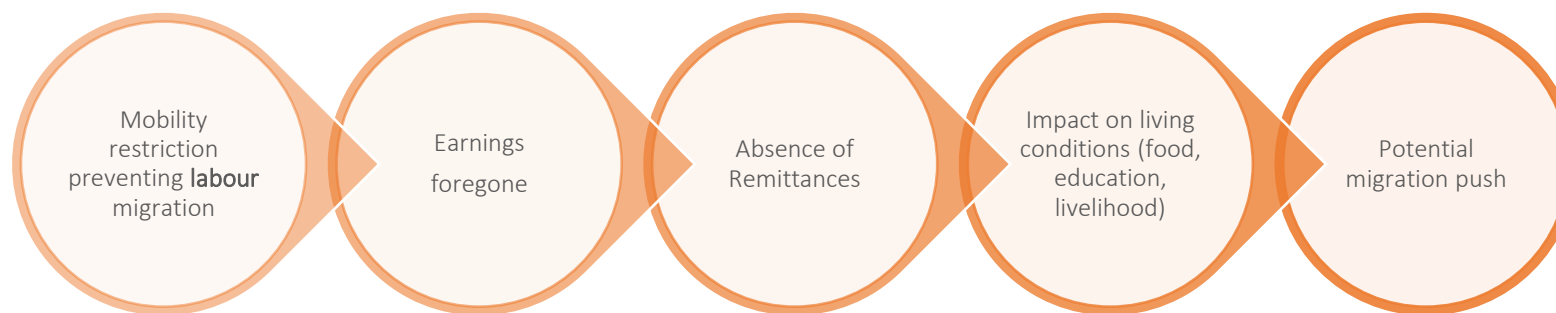
<sup>131</sup> Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Report: West Africa, Quarter 3 2020*, July 2020.

<sup>132</sup> Guadagno, Lorenzo, "Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An initial analysis", *IOM Migration Research Series No. 60*, 2020.

<sup>133</sup> IOM, WFP, *Populations at risk: Implications of COVID-19 for hunger, migration and displacement*, 2020.

<sup>134</sup> IOM, *COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #6: Stigmatization & discrimination*, 2 April 2020.

<sup>135</sup> Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Report: West Africa, Quarter 3 2020*, July 2020.



*Figure 6. Impact of COVID-19 mobility restriction measures on mobility and livelihoods in West and Central Africa*

## 2. INTRA-REGIONAL MIGRATION

West and Central Africa, a region with multitude of interlocking migration networks and intense mobility flows, hosts an estimated 9,803,923 migrants. This represents 3 per cent of all international migrants worldwide. The vast majority of migration flows take place within the region: 83 per cent of migration movements take place internally to the region. Côte d'Ivoire hosts the highest number of immigrants (estimated at 2.6 million individuals), followed by Nigeria (1.3 million) and Burkina Faso (724,000)<sup>136, 137</sup>.

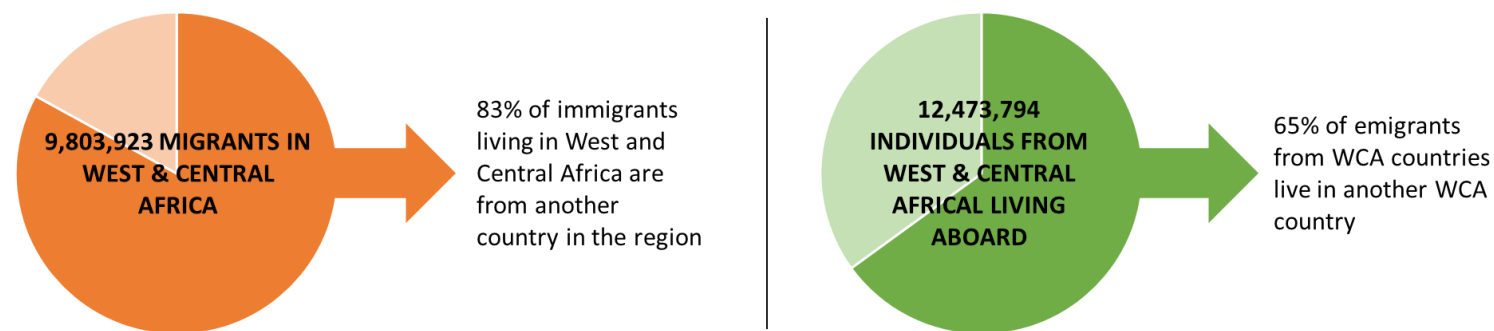


Figure 7. Immigration and Emigration in West and Central Africa <sup>138</sup>

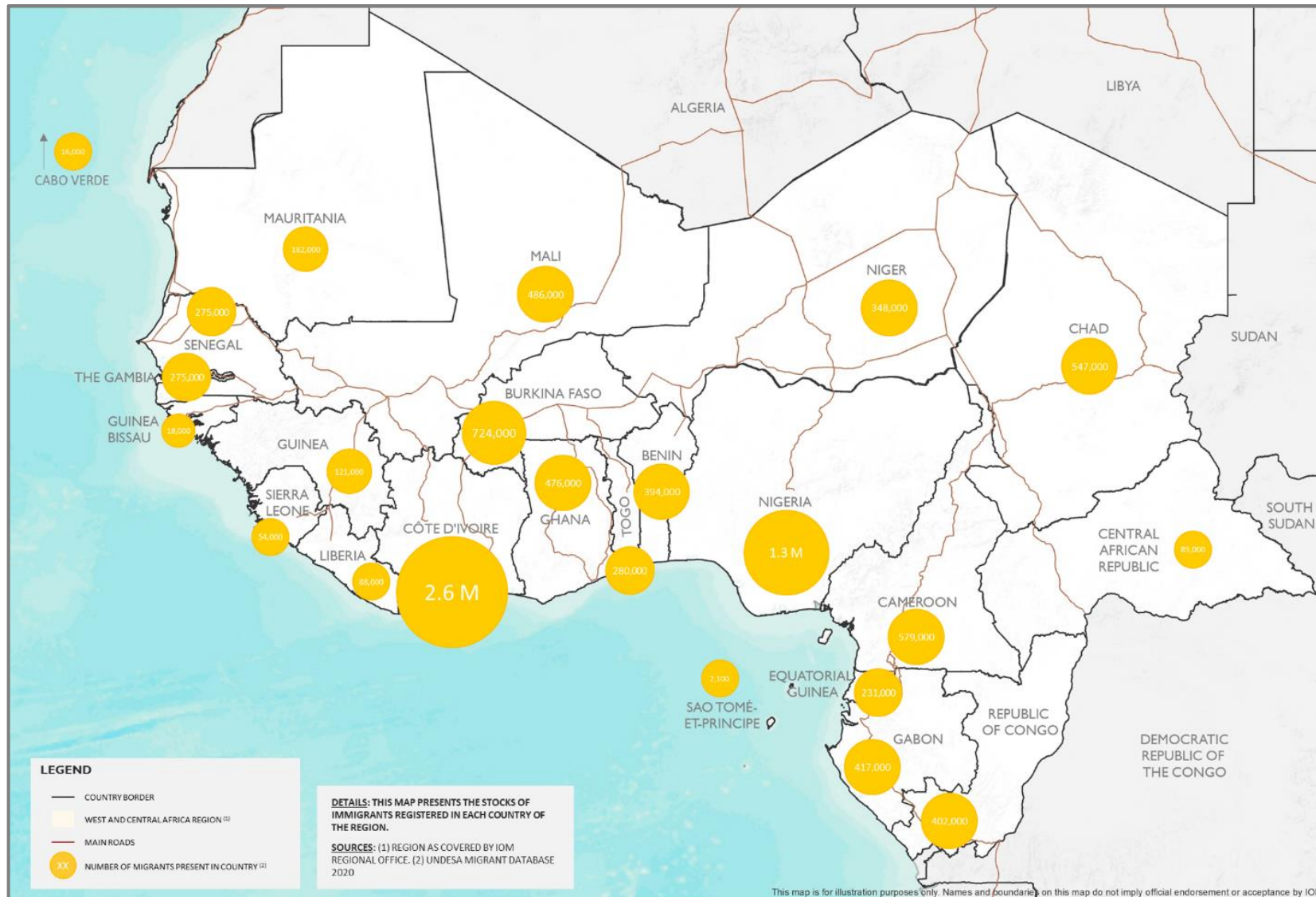
West and Central Africa is also a key region of origin of migrants: 12,473,794 migrants come from West and Central Africa, representing 4 per cent of all emigrants worldwide. Reflecting the largely internal dimension of regional migration, 65 per cent of West and Central African migrants live in another country in the region. Nigeria (1.6 million individuals), Burkina Faso (1.6 million), Mali (1.3 million) and Côte d'Ivoire (1.1 million) have the highest number of emigrants, with the vast majority residing in a neighbouring country. According to UNDESA, 66 per cent of the 12.5 million West and Central African migrants reside in another country in the region. Nevertheless, a third (34%) live in another region, primarily Europe (19%), North America (8%). North African countries also attract large numbers of migrants, where they can find employment in a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, construction, and domestic work.

→  
83% of migrants in West and Central Africa come from another country in the region

<sup>136</sup> UNDESA, *International Migration Highlights 2020*, 2021.

<sup>137</sup> There are significant data deficits on movement, and accurate migration figures are difficult to ascertain. Making reliable migration data available presents a key challenge to supporting State- and regional-level decision-making. Wide and porous borders, weak capacities to register entry to and exit from national territories, as well as the nature, diversity and complexity of certain migration flows contribute to this data challenge.

<sup>138</sup> UNDESA, *International Migration Highlights 2020*, 2021.



Map 9. Migrant stocks in West and Central Africa, in 2020 <sup>139</sup>

<sup>139</sup> UNDESA 2020; taken from IOM WCA, *Regional Mobility Mapping*, June 2020.

## MIGRATION TRENDS

Although internal migration flows were deeply affected by COVID-19, they returned to pre-COVID levels in mid-2020, and in some locations saw a large increase when compared to 2019. Indeed, IOM data in the second half of the year seem to indicate that, despite the COVID-19 crisis, flows were significantly higher in 2020 than in 2019: in the periods January-February 2020, migration flows were on average 26 per cent larger in 2020 than in 2019 while in October-December migrations flows were on average 39 per cent larger in 2020 than in 2019.

Mobility patterns witnessed characteristic ebbs and flows. These patterns coincide with seasonal periods of intensified mobility involving cross-border agropastoral movements, movements of seasonal labourers during, harvesting, mining or fishing season, the beginning and end of school terms, and religious and cultural festivities.

In August and October 2020, Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) along the Chad-Cameroon border recorded large seasonal movements of students travelling between the two countries to sit end-of-year exams and for the start of the academic year<sup>140</sup>. In Mali and Niger, peaks in mobility were observed in February and October 2020, translating the movement of seasonal labourers for agricultural and mining activities (primarily in Burkina Faso, Niger and Algeria)<sup>141</sup>. And throughout the region, large numbers of individuals travelled for religious holidays such as Tabaski (Aïd al-Adha), the Magal in Senegal<sup>142</sup> and Christmas and end-of-year festivities<sup>143</sup>.

Mobility was also affected by environmental factors as well as the state of roads and other infrastructure. In Niger, Cameroon, Nigeria and Chad, floods caused by heavy rains severely deteriorated the state of roads and completely shut off roads and transit towns, hampering mobility, forcing travellers to take long detours<sup>144</sup> or forcing populations at risk to move to neighbouring locations for several weeks, increasing pendular displacements. Meanwhile, unprecedented sandstorms in northern Chad and Niger made vehicle traffic difficult, severely hindering mobility of travellers<sup>145</sup>. These factors were linked to steep drops in flows observed at FMPs between July and October 2020. As environmental and climactic events have become more extreme in recent years, mobility in the region has been increasingly affected.

## PROFILES OF MIGRANTS

Surveys conducted by IOM with travellers throughout West and Central Africa found that the majority of migrants travelling within the region (82%) were male, while 18 per cent were female. Most migrants were young: over 80 per cent of surveyed individuals were between the ages

**Intraregional migration witnessed seasonal patterns involving labour migration, the movement of students and religious festivities**



**Environmental factors hampered impacted mobility in the region**

<sup>140</sup> IOM Cameroon, *Flow Monitoring Report 9, August 2020*, September 2020; IOM Chad, *Flow Monitoring Report 44, October-December 2020*, February 2021.

<sup>141</sup> IOM Mali, *Rapport trimestriel sur les flux migratoires, octobre – décembre 2020*, February 2021.

<sup>142</sup> IOM Senegal, *Rapport sur le suivi des flux de populations, octobre 2020*, November 2020.

<sup>143</sup> IOM Nigeria, *Flow Monitoring Report 46, December 2020*, February 2021.

<sup>144</sup> IOM Niger, *Flow Monitoring Report 39, September 2020v*, October 2020.

<sup>145</sup> IOM Chad, *Flow Monitoring Report 44, October-December 2020*, February 2021.



of 18 and 35, while 17 per cent were aged 36-59. A small number of migrants (1%) were children. While over half of migrants (53%) were married, a large proportion (42%) were single. There were vast differences between countries: 81 per cent of travellers interviewed in Mali were single, while the majority of travellers in Chad (55%) were married.

Most surveyed migrants (35%) were unemployed and looking for work. The share of unemployed migrants grew between 2019 and 2020, reflecting the economic toll of the COVID-19 crisis on employment in the region. A further 31 per cent were self-employed, while 19 per cent had a job. Indeed, many migrants are young men and women who work in the informal sector, as daily wage labourers, as street vendors and in small shops, or as trainees, and migrate in search of greater stability or better economic opportunities. Notably, 6 per cent of surveyed migrants were students. Here again, differences were observed between countries: 50 per cent of migrants in Mali were unemployed, while in Chad and Senegal, the majority of interviewees (35% and 61%, respectively) were self-employed. Furthermore, 29 per cent of travellers surveyed in Chad were students, reflecting the large movements of students observed each year at FMPs in southern Chad.

In terms of education, the largest share of intraregional migrants (29%) did not have any education of any kind, while 21 per cent had completed primary education and 21 per cent Koranic schooling. This situation reflects the importance of low-skilled labour migration in West and Central Africa. Only 4 per cent of travellers had a university education. In Chad, however, as could be deduced from the fact that many students cross FMPs in southern Chad, 20 per cent of travellers had a university education (this was only the case for 2% of migrants in Mali). Nevertheless, a large proportion of migrants (22% in Chad, 37% in Mali, 35% in Senegal) had not received any education. A much higher proportion of migrants in Chad (16%) than Mali (2%) and Senegal (9%) had received a religious education.

Most migrants (49%) were travelling in a group, while 23 per cent were travelling alone (27% did not give any answer). Women were much less likely than men to travel alone, possibly because of the increased risks and vulnerabilities which women face while travelling alone.

## REASONS FOR MIGRATION

Economic and labour mobility are the most significant drivers of intraregional migration. Seasonal, temporary and permanent migrant workers typically move in pursuit of livelihood opportunities, with a significant proportion of labour migrants active in low-skilled sectors, including domestic work, informal trade, construction and agriculture.

West and Central Africa offers a wide range of activities and livelihood opportunities. The tri-border area between Mali, Guinea and Senegal, Niger and Burkina Faso as well as northern Niger and northern Chad are large mining areas attracting many West and Central Africa nationals. Ports and fishing grounds along the long West and Central African coastline, from Mauritania to Gabon; industries; farmland; and forestland in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea are also drawing large mobile populations in search of employment opportunities. Large urban centres and capital cities, which offer a plethora of economic opportunities and service-related work (taxi, mobile credit sale, auto repairs, domestic work) also present a strong pull factor for migrants.



**Most migrants in West and Central Africa were male (82%), young (80%), unemployed (35%) and completed basic education (71%)**

Other significant drivers of mobility include business-related movements, such as travelling to markets to buy and sell goods, to re-stock and to conduct business.

Labour migration is first and foremost driven by the search for economic and livelihood opportunities. It is also triggered in part by unemployment, economic hardship and financial privation. IOM data for 2017-2020 shows that 87 per cent of travellers migrating in search of income generating opportunities originated from countries with high youth unemployment (Nigeria and Guinea) or high multidimensional poverty (Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad)<sup>146</sup>, which count as amongst the poorest countries in the world, with very low standards of living and offering limited access to services including education and health.

Labour migration may also be a result of social and cultural norms and expectations. Indeed, in many countries of the region, migration has taken the role of a rite of passage into adulthood, especially for young men. In the recent past, social and cultural pressures has increasingly encouraged young women, who are increasingly breadwinners in their households, to migrate in order to provide for their families<sup>147</sup>.

The importance of economic factors as contributors to intraregional migration dynamics is corroborated by surveys conducted by IOM with travellers throughout the region, a majority of which (78%) indicated travelling for economic reasons<sup>148</sup>. Chief amongst economic reasons were the search of work and livelihood opportunities (74%) and conducting business (17%). Interestingly, 2 per cent of migrants were travelling with cattle as part of agropastoral activities.

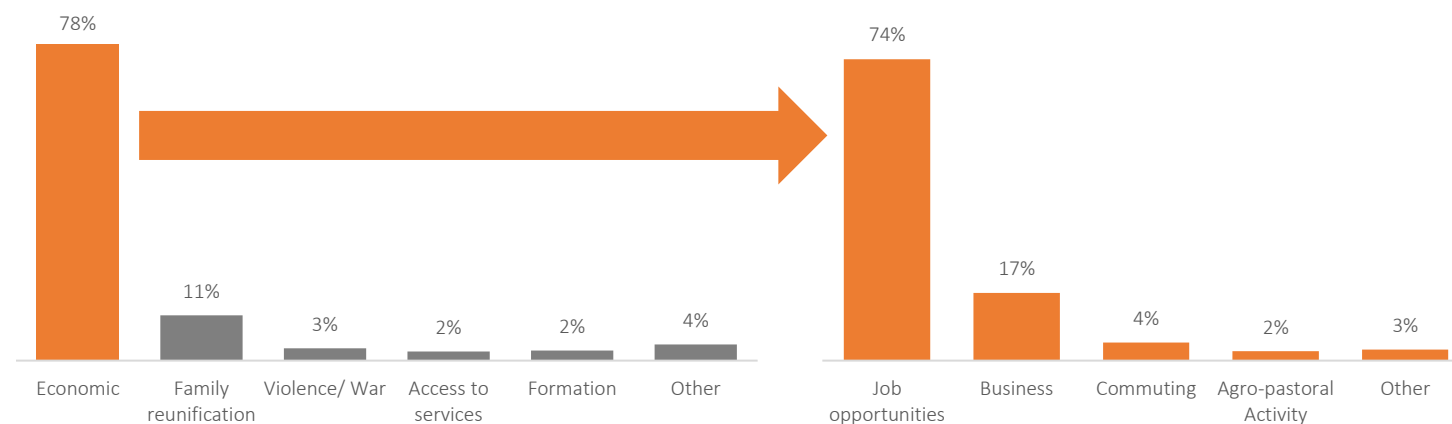


Figure 8. Reasons of movement of travellers in West and Central Africa, in 2020<sup>149</sup>

<sup>146</sup> FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, IOM, “See Migration Like Water”: An Analysis of IOM Flow Monitoring Survey Data on Migration Flows in West and Central Africa, March 2021.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

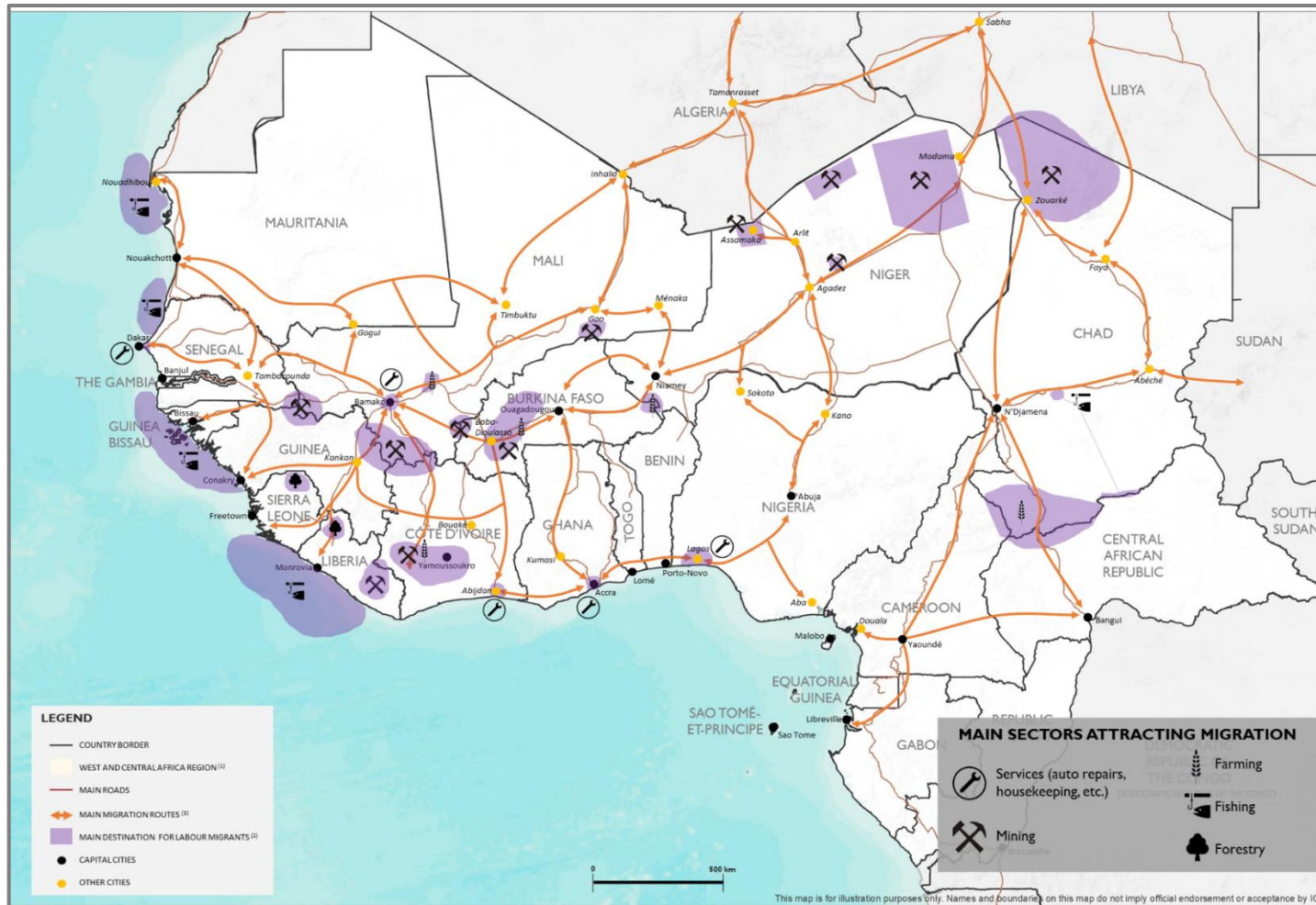
<sup>148</sup> IOM, *Suivi des flux de populations — Enquêtes individuelles (2018—2020)*, March 2021.

<sup>149</sup> IOM WCA, Flow Monitoring Survey Report (2018-2020), April 2021.



**Economic and labour mobility was the primary migration driver for 78% of travellers in West and Central Africa**

Labour migration is not the only type of migration in the region: a significant share of travellers surveyed by IOM were joining family members (11%) and were seeking better access to services (2%). Notably, 3 per cent were forcibly displaced as a result of conflict, violence or insecurity. Migrants who reported having been forcibly displaced were primarily observed in Chad, which has been affected by an insurgency and complex emergency since 2014.



Map 10. High labour mobility areas in West and Central Africa<sup>150</sup>

<sup>150</sup> IOM WCA, *Regional Mobility Mapping*, June 2020

## RISKS AND CHALLENGES IN INTRAREGIONAL MIGRATION

Intraregional migration, while less hazardous than migration to North Africa and Europe (See section Risks and challenges in migration to North Africa and Europe), nevertheless holds risks and challenges. Amongst travellers interviewed by IOM between 2018-2020 who provided information on hazards faced during the journey, 38 per cent indicated having faced challenges during their travels. The main issues faced by respondents were linked to strained finances (43%), lack of documentation (41%), food insecurity (39%) and lack of shelter (39%). These reported difficulties are interrelated. Financial problems lead to food and accommodation insecurity, while lack of documentation can prevent physical access to shelters<sup>151</sup>.

A small but significant percentage of respondents who reported facing challenges mentioned exposure to physical harm as one of the difficulties along their journeys. Incidents of attacks were reported by 6 per cent of respondents, while 2 per cent mentioned physical injuries.



*Migrants in the Nigerien desert © IOM 2020.*



**The main challenges faced by travellers in West and Central Africa were financial hardship, lack of documentation, food insecurity and lack of shelter**

<sup>151</sup> FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, IOM, *See Migration Like Water™: An Analysis of IOM Flow Monitoring Survey Data on Migration Flows in West and Central Africa*, March 2021.

## CASE STUDY 1 - MIGRATION TO GOLD MINES



*Mining site in Koboni, Guinea © IOM/Aissata Fofana 2019.*

Artisanal gold mining is a long-standing practice in West and Central Africa. For centuries, gold mining in these regions has been exclusively carried out through artisanal methods attracting migrants from across the region, who move to gold mining regions with the hope to find gold and improve their lives. Since the discovery of a new seam in Central Sahel in 2012, gold mining has been a rapidly growing industry, and mining operations can now be conducted throughout the year. Immense wealth is generated by artisanal gold extractive industries for West African economies in general (an estimated annual worth of CFA 232.2 billion in Burkina Faso in 2017 – USD 415 million, contrasting with the precarious lives of gold diggers in mining areas). Yet, the attractiveness of artisanal mining has led to a surge in cross-border mobility between gold mines and in migration to sites within countries and is now resulting in significant internal and interregional migration flows in West and Central Africa.

In order to better understand migration dynamics to and from targeted gold mining sites as well as the profiles and conditions of migrants in these sites, IOM conducted research studies as part of a regional initiative taking place in four countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, Guinea. A mixed research methodology was used, including individual quantitative interviews with mine workers, qualitative key informant interviews and group discussions with community members.

Research results reveal that gold mining migration is the result from different types of migration flows. While gold mining is a well-established ancestral tradition in the regions targeted by the research, its role has changed dramatically over the years for migrants and local communities, evolving from a seasonal and complementary activity to their main source of income. In the countries selected for the study, traditional gold mining appeared to be a strategy used by poor households with unstable income streams, most of them farmers, to diversify

**Artisanal gold mining is a centuries-old practice in West and Central Africa**

their incomes. However, what is observed now is that mining became the primary source of gains for certain households. Rural populations tend to abandon farm work and leave their lands behind.

A key aspect of gold rushes is also the secondary migration wave induced by the arrival of thousands of gold prospectors. To meet the needs of a growing population, individuals are migrating to gold mining areas to open a variety of businesses and services, including restaurants, equipment stores, shops, barber shops, etc. reshaping the environment in gold-producing areas.

Migration flows in this context are also both internal and regional. In some places, for example in Burkina Faso, the mines attract fewer foreign workers. They tend to draw individuals from neighbouring villages or regions who once lived off the land but now have to find a supplementary activity to buy material or livestock. In the meantime, in Mali gold mining activities appear to also generate larger cross-border migration flows, even though most of the workers on the sites are Malian. According to the results of the study, Burkinabe nationals are the second-largest group in Mali, while in Senegal, 75 per cent of miners on surveyed sites are international migrants.

Field interviews conducted in the course of the research underscore the constant and very dynamic nature of migration to gold mines, with a constant stream of new arrivals: for example, on the gold mining sites selected for the research in Mali, 20 per cent of workers had arrived less than three months prior to the study. This shows that the mining sites are steadily growing and expanding as new workers arrive. Against the assumption that gold mining sites are transit points for migrants wishing to migrate internationally in Europe, this study highlighted that despite hostile and precarious living conditions, migrants have intentions to settle in the long-term. Most gold diggers see mining as a way to achieve upward social mobility. They also consider gold digging as a long-term project. Indeed, 40 per cent of gold miners in Mali and Burkina Faso wish to remain on mining sites in the near future. Furthermore, among miners wishing to leave the current site at the moment of the survey between 70 to 80 per cent were actually planning to go back to their locality of origin, only 4 per cent were planning to migrate to Europe and 4 per cent to work at other sites in West Africa. In Senegal, the mining zones appear as zones of destination rather than transit areas.

An important additional finding concerns the socio-economic profile of gold miners, who are usually young adult males (50% are between 25 and 35 years old), with low levels of education. Artisanal, hand-dug pits tend to attract low-skilled, impoverished and often unemployed people. Women and children are also important contributors to the workforce on mining sites, despite existing child protection laws. Women on gold mining sites find financial independence and autonomy through gold-digging. Working on gold mines thus becomes a means of empowerment for women, something more difficult to achieve in other sectors of activity. Nevertheless, gender discrimination still prevails on mining sites; local management structures are mostly dominated by men and tradition prevents women from going down into the pits to extract gold, which is the most lucrative activity. Women's roles on gold mines are usually limited to crushing and washing sediments. Worse, research results, beyond establishing significant risks of human rights violations on mining sites such as forced prostitution and child labour, confirmed the presence of many women victims of human trafficking. Their living conditions are strikingly similar across all four countries, and characterised by isolation, poor access to health care facilities, insecurity and exploitative labour conditions with no measures of workplace protection, which tend to suggest the existence of a sub-regional trafficking system in West and Central Africa. The hostile and precarious living conditions do not stop migrants from settling in the sites.

While small-scale mining will continue to represent a major source of income for populations and attract more internal and international migrants, the increasing security challenges in the Sahel linked to the presence of armed groups, combined with poverty, environmental and human rights issues, make the regulation of artisanal mining and the protection of vulnerable migrants key priorities in the region.

**Gold mining has evolved from being a seasonal, diversifying activity to being the object of a 'gold rush', attracting migrants from the entire region**

**Migration to gold mines is highly dynamic and witnessed continuous growth**

## CASE STUDY 2 - TRANSHUMANCE AND AGROPASTORAL NOMADISM

**Transhumant pastoralism in West and Central Africa involves 20 million individuals and 70% of the region's cattle**



*An IOM enumerator at a transit point for transhumant cattle in Burkina Faso © IOM/Alexander Bee 2019*

Transhumance, a form of pastoralism which sees herders and their livestock migrate on a seasonal basis between complementary ecological areas, from areas with scarce grazing lands and water sources to areas with more abundant pastures and water<sup>152</sup>, is an historic, traditional and common practice across West and Central Africa. Indeed, transhumance is witnessed to varying degrees in every country of the region<sup>153</sup>, and contributes significantly to human mobility and livelihoods in the region. Transhumance pastoralism involves a very large number of individuals

<sup>152</sup> CIRAD, *Dictionnaire des sciences animales* [online]<http://dico-sciences-animales.cirad.fr> (accessed 30 December 2019); SWAC-OECD, *The future of livestock in the Sahel and West Africa: potentials and challenges*.

<sup>153</sup> Corniaux, Christian et al., *"Cross-border livestock mobility: Challenges for West Africa"*, *FAO Policy Brief*, January 2018.

**A combination of factors is producing significant and fundamental shifts in regional transhumance**



**Conflicts between herders and farmers have become more frequent and increased in intensity**

(20 million) and animals (70% of the region's cattle, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization<sup>154</sup>); is one of the largest providers of meat and milk in the region<sup>155</sup>; and is also a highly productive economic activity<sup>156</sup> upon which many populations depend for food and income.

Transhumant herders heavily rely on the openness of borders to conduct transhumance movements, highlighting the interconnectedness of mobility patterns in the region and importance of intraregional flows for the livelihoods of local communities. Data collected by IOM, the Réseau Billital Maroobé (RBM) and other partners in 2020, through the Transhumance Tracking Tool (TTT), identified a total of 881,463 animals, accompanied by 32,599 transhumant herders, moving across the region.

A multitude of factors has altered the structures and patterns of transhumance mobility.<sup>157</sup> An erratic climate and slow onset climate events such as desertification and irregular rainfall; demographic pressure; greater stress on land and natural resources, increasing population densities and shrinking pastoral areas and available water; insecurity and political instability and volatility; growing restrictions on cross-border movements; and policy changes have forced shifts in the seasonal routes of transhumance movements and rendered the timing of these movements more unpredictable and irregular. These events are also shifting the calendar of transhumant mobility, leading herds to travel earlier or later than expected, in unpredictable fashion or en masse. In Cameroon, for instance, IOM identified 79 early, late or mass movements of cattle which led to conflicts between herders and farmers between August and December 2020<sup>158</sup>.

While transhumance herder communities traditionally travel along transhumance corridors (strips of land reserved for the passage of livestock to access pastures, water and infrastructure such as markets or vaccination areas), the aforementioned factors have not only led pastoralist herders encroach on farms and sedentary farming communities extend the use of lands beyond agreed zones; they have also driven a southern shift of transhumance mobility, prevented herders from returning north and forced them to settle in host regions.

Simultaneously, farmers have expanded their farmland, encroaching on corridors used by transhumant herders and their cattle<sup>159,160</sup>. Consequently, these circumstances have generated growing competition over resources. As a result, violent clashes between herders and farmers have become more frequent and have grown significantly in scale<sup>161</sup>, at times leading to population displacement. These tensions have also crystalized into communal animosity. Between August and December 2020, IOM in Cameroon recorded 448 agropastoralist conflicts, the vast majority of which (400) led to the destruction of crops, tools and homes, 25 of which generated population displacements.

<sup>154</sup> FAOSTAT, *Data on live animals in Western Africa* [online] (accessed 30 December 2019).

<sup>155</sup> An estimated 65% of cattle meat and 70% of milk, see SWAC-OECD, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>156</sup> It is thought to contribute up to 15% of GDP of countries in the Sahel, see PRAPS, *Pastoral Livestock Farming in the Sahel and West Africa: Five preconceptions put to the test*, 2017.

<sup>157</sup> UNOWAS, *Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel: Towards Peaceful Coexistence*, August 2018; Corniaux et al, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>158</sup> IOM Cameroon, *Tableau de bord du suivi des mouvements de transhumance 4 (Novembre — Décembre 2020)*, 29 January 2021.

<sup>159</sup> Alidou, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>160</sup> Godde, Lisa, "Migration on the Western Mediterranean Route as "new nomadism": focus on Mauritania", in IOM GMDAC, *Migration in West and North Africa and Across the Mediterranean: Trends, Risks, Development and Governance*, 2020.

<sup>161</sup> ECOWAS, "Finding lasting solutions to resolve conflicts between farmers and herders in West Africa", April 26, 2018; Human Rights Watch, "Farmer-Herder Conflicts on the Rise in West Africa", 6 August 2018.





### Closed borders due to the COVID-19 crisis stranded thousands of transhumant herders

Furthermore, climatic events such as droughts, floods and fire outbreaks, are leading transhumant herders to adopt adaptation strategies and change their itinerary and timetable. In the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, IOM and RBM identified 11 natural disasters in November and December 2020, primarily bushfires, which forced herds to change their route or delay their travel<sup>162</sup>.

The year 2020 generated further challenges for transhumant populations in the region, as the COVID-19 pandemic affected transhumance mobility in the region with governments imposing mobility restrictions, including the closure of borders and limits on internal movements. Thousands of herders and animals became stranded at borders areas such as in southern Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali with no possibility to continue their route towards coastal countries. In April 2020, DTM Mauritania estimated that over 7,000 transhumant herders, accompanying hundreds of thousands of cattle, were stranded at the border and unable to lead their cattle to pastures and water points<sup>163</sup>. This situation led agropastoralists to compete over natural resources with local communities, increasing risks of tensions and conflicts. This also negatively impacted the economic status of herders with consequences on health and food security of both herders and cattle.

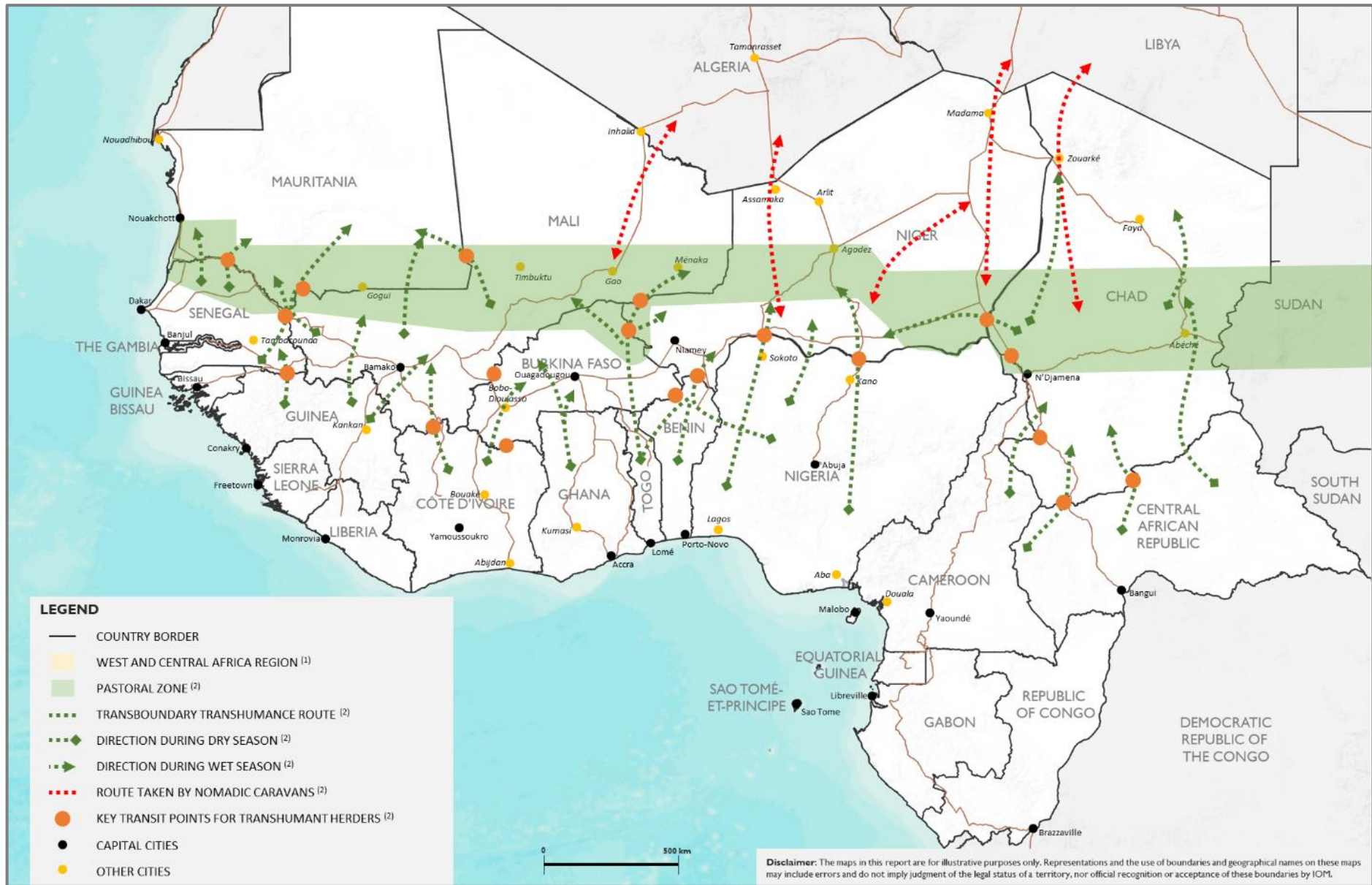
Another notable trend observed in 2020 was the shift in transhumance patterns in several countries in the region. In Cameroon, the majority of transboundary movements recorded during the dry season (from October to December 2020) headed from Cameroon to Chad and the Central African Republic, the opposite of what is usually observed during that period<sup>164</sup>. This may be linked to increasing tensions and growing numbers of conflicts between herders and farmers in eastern Cameroon, where transhumant herders would usually settle, which are leading herders to travel back to neighbouring countries to find grazing land and water points for their cattle. Similarly, in Mauritania, some south-north movements were recorded during the dry season and of north-south movements during the rainy season<sup>165</sup>. This represents a significant shift from historical patterns in transhumance flows whereby North to South movements are traditionally carried out during the dry season and South to North movements during the rainy season. Reasons for this development relate to a number context-specific aspects. The beginning of the harvesting season in Mali may be a factor pushing back transhumant herders, conducting them to return to leave traditional grazing lands in order to avoid conflicts with farmers. Furthermore, vegetation and lands that are rich in salt, known as *cure salée*, are common at the Mauritanian side of the border with Mali. These constitute a preferred destination, especially for Malian transhumants between July and December – 70 per cent of South to North movements observed in October were undertaken by Malian transhumants, whereas Malian herders only represent 24 per cent of the entire transhumant population.

<sup>162</sup> IOM Burkina Faso, *Suivi des mouvements de transhumance – Alertes 1 (Octobre – Décembre 2020)*, 23 February 2021.

<sup>163</sup> IOM Mauritania, *Suivi des urgences 1 (15 Mars – 8 Avril 2020)*, 16 April 2020.

<sup>164</sup> IOM Cameroon, *Tableau de bord du comptage des mouvements de transhumance 1 (Octobre – Décembre 2020)*, 24 February 2021.

<sup>165</sup> IOM Mauritania, *Cartographie des directions des mouvements transhumants (Décembre 2019 – Octobre 2020)*, March 2021.



Map 11. Main transhumance routes in West and Central Africa<sup>166</sup>

<sup>166</sup> IOM WCA, *Regional Mobility Mapping*, June 2020.



**92% of migration flows in West and Central Africa are internal to the region**

### 3. INTER-REGIONAL MIGRATION

The vast majority of migration flows in West and Central Africa are internal to the region. According to UNDESA, 66 per cent of the 13 million West and Central African migrants reside in another country in the region. IOM data shows that, in 2020, 92 per cent of flows (accounting for 1.8 million movements) across the region were internal to the region (from one West and Central African country to another).

		DEPARTURE REGION			TOTAL
		WCA	NORTH AFRICA	OTHER	
DESTINATION REGION	WCA	92%	3%	0%	95%
	NORTH AFRICA	5%	0%	0%	5%
	OTHER	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Total	<b>97%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 8. Regions of departure and intended destination regions of travellers in West and Central Africa in 2020<sup>167</sup>*

According to UNDESA, a third of migrants (34%) live in another region, primarily Europe (19%) and North America (8%)<sup>168</sup>. North African countries also attract large numbers of migrants, where they can find employment in a wide range of areas, including agriculture, construction, and domestic work. Indeed, IOM recorded 8 per cent of inter-flows (163,000 movements) in 2020, mostly headed to and coming from Algeria and Libya. These trends show the close bonds between West and Central African countries and their northern neighbours, driven by centuries of inter-regional trade, migration and exchanges.

### MOVEMENTS BETWEEN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA AND NORTH AFRICA

**West and Central Africa and North Africa enjoy close links, driven by centuries of exchange and trade**

Libya has historically been a major destination country for foreign workers from across sub-Saharan Africa, as well an important country of refuge and of transit for refugees seeking protection and safety. Despite the ongoing conflict in parts of the country and the related economic disruption, Libya remains an attractive destination for migrants, as high demand for migrant labour in Libya's labour market continue to make it an attractive destination for migrants. Algeria also constituted a prime country of destination for migrants from West and Central Africa, and in particular witnesses large circular migration movements of migrants in search of temporary and seasonal labour. Southern Algeria is also at the crossroads of trade routes, particularly the Trans-Saharan Road linking Algiers (Algeria) to Lagos (Nigeria)<sup>169</sup>.

<sup>167</sup> IOM WCA, 2020 Flow Monitoring Registry data.

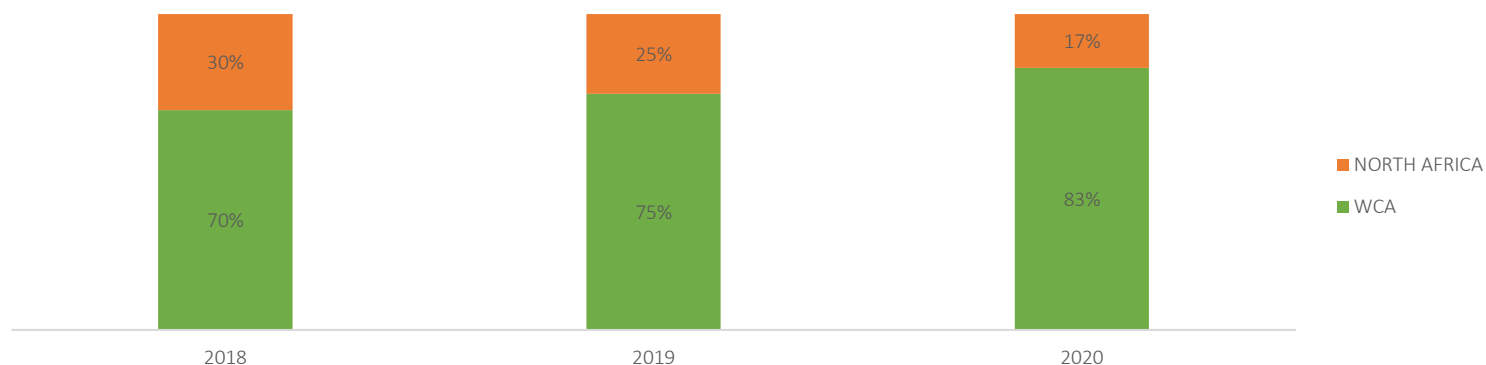
<sup>168</sup> UNDESA, *International Migration Highlights 2020*, 2021.

<sup>169</sup> IOM, UNHCR, *Mass Expulsions from Algeria and Eastern Libya: Background Paper and Points for Discussion*, December 2020.



**Between 2018 and 2020, fewer migrants travelled from West and Central Africa to North Africa**

IOM Flow Monitoring Points along the borders between Mali, Niger and Chad and Algeria and Libya<sup>170</sup> recorded over 1.5 million individual movements in 2018-2020. The majority of these flows (73%) were headed to a destination in West and Central Africa. Migrants were either returning home from North Africa or heading from countries in North Africa to the northern regions of Chad, Mali and Niger to work in the mining industry or for other economic activities. Over three years of data collection (2018-2020), the proportion of movements to North Africa, when compared to movements from North Africa, progressively decreased from 30 per cent of all flows in 2018 (120,000 travellers), to 17 per cent in 2020 (95,000 individuals), showcasing the more balanced and less one-sided nature of flows between the two regions. Analysing this trend, it can safely be assumed that, over these three years, fewer migrants travelled to North Africa, possibly because of stricter controls at the borders.

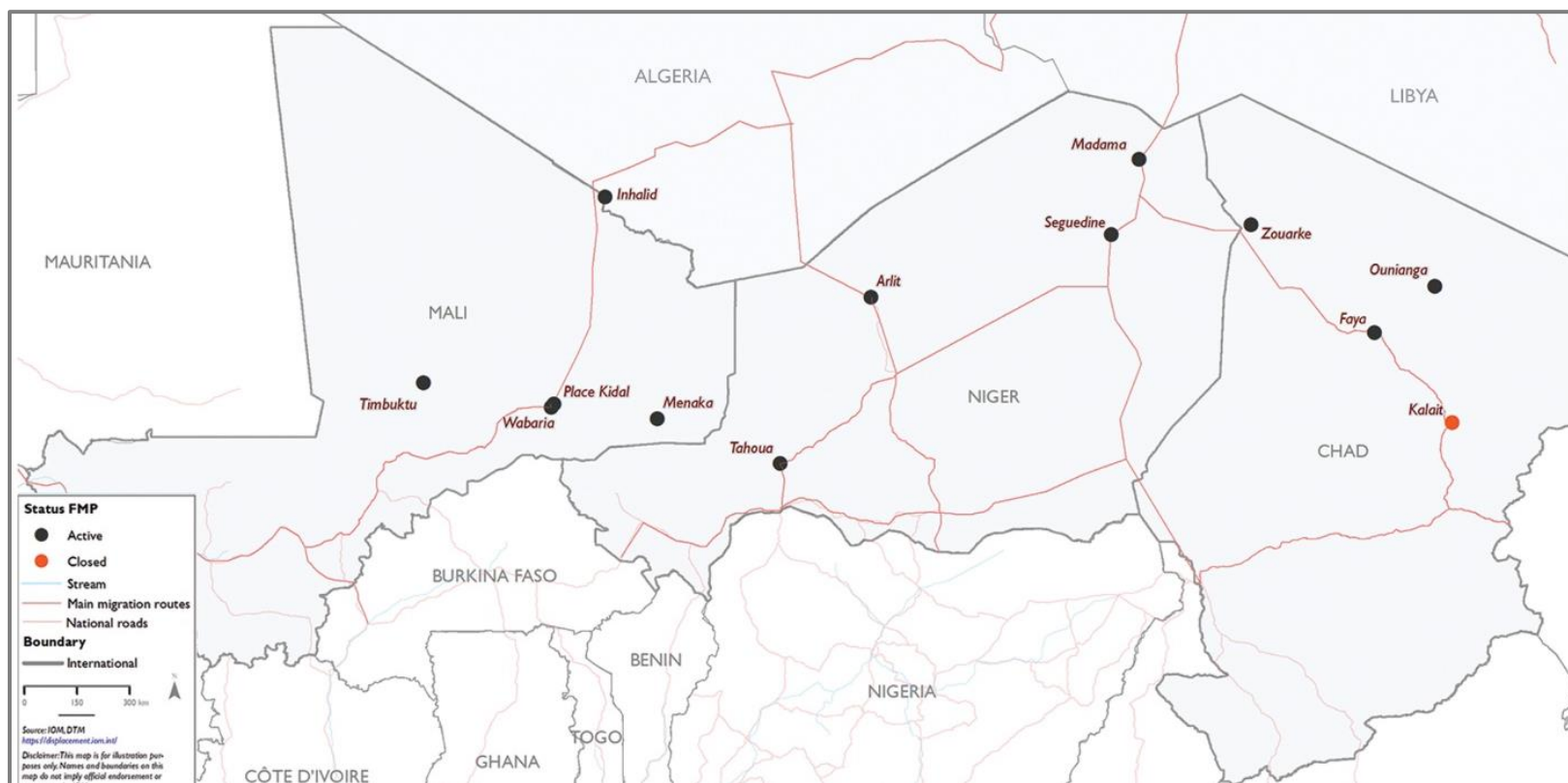


*Figure 9. Regions of destination of travellers in Chad, Mali and Niger<sup>171</sup>*

Detailing the destination of the 1.5 million movements recorded between West and Central Africa and North Africa provides a better understanding of migration trends in the northern border regions of West and Central Africa in 2018-2020. Outgoing movements, from West and Central Africa to North Africa, have been much more inconsistent than incoming movements, from North Africa to West and Central Africa. This points to the high volatility of movements in these areas rapidly impacted by various events linked to security conditions, economic opportunities or border management. The inconsistency of outgoing flows (from WCA to North Africa) highlights the quick adaptation of migration routes following border closures, emerging and declining economic opportunities, or increased surveillance at borders.

<sup>170</sup> FMPs are located in Inhalid, Timbuktu, Gao and Menaka (Mali), in Faya, Kalait, Ounianga Kebir and Zouarké Chad) and in Arlit, Madama, Tahoua and Séguédine (Niger).

<sup>171</sup> IOM Flow Monitoring Registry Data.



Map 12. Locations of FMPs in the northern regions of Chad, Mali and Niger

A comparative analysis of outgoing (from WCA to North Africa) and incoming (from North Africa to WCA) flows provides an indication of the evolution of the volume of migrants headed to North Africa from 2018 to 2020. In 2020, 34,000 more individuals travelled from West and Central Africa to North Africa than returned from North Africa to West and Central Africa. This is 40 per cent less than in 2019 (57,000) and 12 per cent less than in 2018 (39,000), reflecting the fact that movements out of the region decreased over time. These analyses may indicate that irregular migration flows from West and Central Africa to North Africa declined in 2020, while returns (both voluntary and forced) from North Africa continued throughout that period.

Indeed, in 2020, for the first time in 3 years of data collection, incoming movements (from North Africa to WCA) were larger than outgoing movements (from WCA to North Africa).

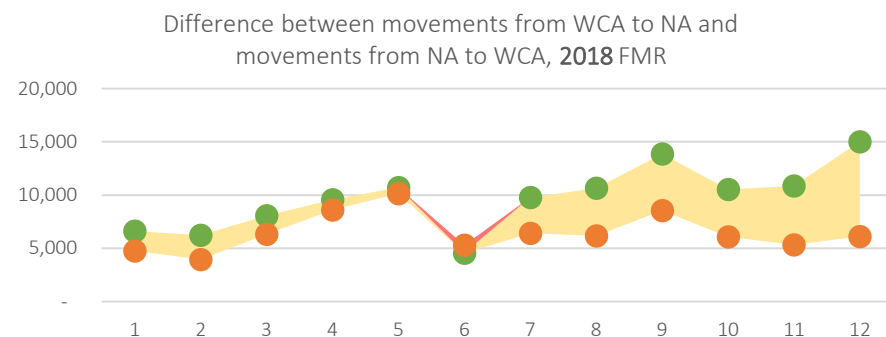
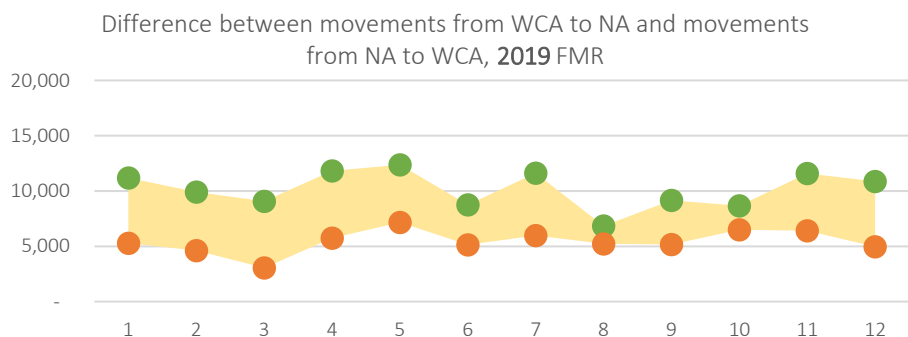
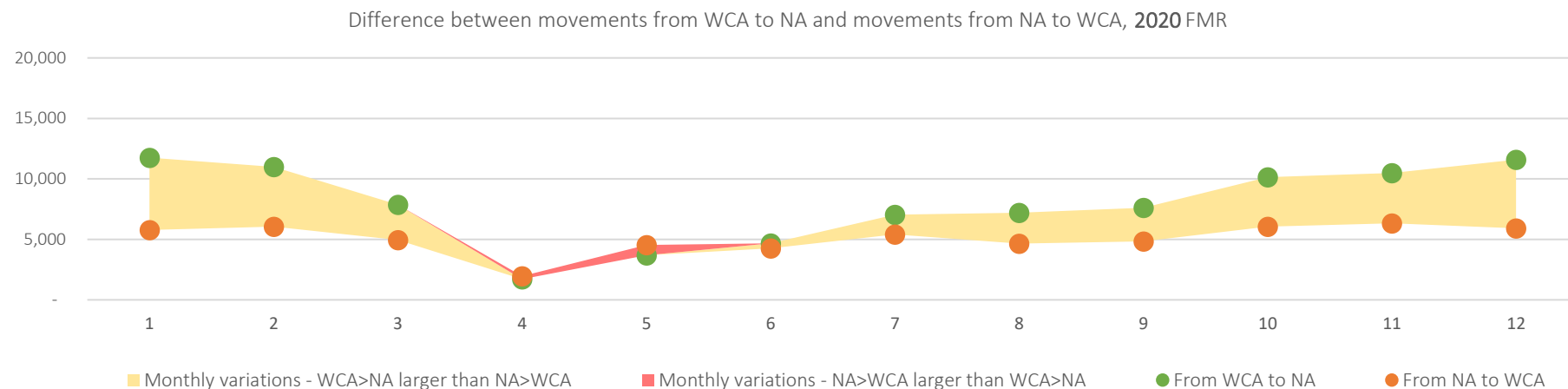
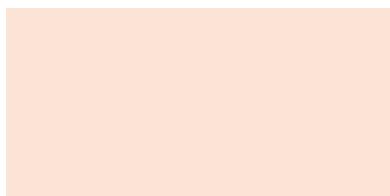


Figure 10. Differences in the magnitudes of flows from West and Central Africa to North Africa and from North Africa to West and Central Africa, in 2018, 2019 and 2020 <sup>172</sup>



Mobility dynamics to and from West and Central Africa varied between countries, which may be an indication of changing migration routes. While Chad witnessed more incoming movements from Libya than movements going to Libya (2,320 more arrivals than departures)- possibly the result of significant numbers of collective expulsions and pushbacks from Libya to Chad throughout 2020- both Niger and Mali witnessed more departures to Algeria than arrivals from Algeria (23,000 more departures in Mali and 109,000 more departures in Niger).

<sup>172</sup> IOM Flow Monitoring Registry Data.

COUNTRY	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL VARIATION 2018-2020
MALI	14,436	6,245	2,292	22,973
NIGER	25,432	51,085	32,261	108,778
CHAD	- 1,151	- 684	- 485	- 2,320

Table 9. Difference between movements from West and Central Africa to North Africa & movements from North Africa to West and Central Africa

**Irregular migrant arrivals to Europe declined by 26% between 2019 and 2020**



**The share of West African nationals amongst all irregular migrant arrivals dropped by 26 percentage points between 2017 and 2020**

## MOVEMENTS FROM WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA TO EUROPE

Between 2017 and 2020, more than 550,000 irregular migrants arrived in Europe (both by land and by sea). Over that period, arrivals to Europe witnessed a continuous drop, with the number of migrants arriving irregularly in Europe decreasing by 48 per cent between 2017 and 2020. From 2019 to 2020 alone, arrivals declined by 26 per cent (from 129,596 to 96,076).

The ranking of the countries of arrival also witnessed stark shifts in 2020. While Greece (71,386) was the main country through which irregular migrants reached Europe in 2019, it was only the third country of arrival in 2020 (14,785), behind Spain (41,861) and Italy (34,154). The number of arrivals to Greece saw a 78 per cent drop between 2019 and 2020, while arrivals to Italy doubled, and arrivals to Spain grew by 18 per cent over the same period.

COUNTRY	2017	2018	2019	2020
GREECE	35,052	50,215	71,386	14,785
ITALY	119,369	23,370	11,471	34,154
SPAIN	28,707	65,325	35,513	41,861
OTHER	2,682	6,240	11,226	5,276
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>185,810</b>	<b>145,150</b>	<b>129,596</b>	<b>96,076</b>

Table 10. Total number of irregular migrant arrivals to Europe, by main country of arrival and year (2017-2020)<sup>173</sup>

Between 2017 and 2020, more than 150,000 individuals from West and Central Africa arrived irregularly in Europe in 2017-2020, representing 27 per cent of all arrivals during this period. However, the share of West and Central African nationals amongst all migrants decreased significantly over that time: while WCA migrants represented 39 per cent of all arrivals to Europe in 2017, their share shrunk to 13 per cent in 2020. This sharp reduction of migration flows to Europe, and more specifically of flows from WCA nationals (decrease of 26 percentage points), can be explained by multiple factors: stricter border surveillance, enhanced and strengthened cooperation agreements on border controls, COVID-19 mobility restrictions, decreased livelihood opportunities and incomes for potential migrants, as well as higher risks of travels.

<sup>173</sup> IOM, *Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview (October – December 2020)*, February 2021.

**Between 2017 and 2020, the primary nationalities of migrants who arrived in Europe shifted significantly**

COUNTRY	2017	2018	2019	2020
GREECE	1,027 (3%)	2,701 (5%)	3,372 (5%)	834 (9%)
ITALY	56,409 (47%)	4,403 (19%)	2,592 (58%)	5,322 (16%)
SPAIN	14,157 (49%)	38,114 (58%)	14,027 (43%)	5,473 (14%) *
OTHER	NA	NA	2,860 (25%)	545 (10%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71,593 (39%)</b>	<b>45,218 (31%)</b>	<b>22,851 (18%)</b>	<b>12,174 (13%)</b>

*Table 11. Number of irregular migrant arrivals to Europe of migrants from West and Central Africa, and proportion of West and Central African nationals amongst total arrivals, by main country of arrival and year (2017-2020)<sup>174,175</sup>*

A notable trend observed between 2019 and 2020 was the significant drop in the share of WCA nationals arriving in Italy and Spain: while citizens of WCA countries arriving in Italy and Spain represented 22 per cent and 43 per cent of all arrivals, respectively, this share shrunk to 16 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively. Meanwhile, the proportion of WCA nationals amidst arrivals to Greece grew from 5 per cent to 9 per cent over the same period.

The primary nationalities of West and Central African migrants who arrived in Europe in 2017-2020 were Guinea (17%), Côte d'Ivoire (15%), and Mali (13%). These three nationalities represented 45 per cent of arrivals from the WCA region. Over time, the nationalities of WCA migrants evolved. The proportion of individuals from Nigeria arriving to Europe significantly declined over the years, from 26 per cent of all arrivals in 2017 to 4 per cent in 2020 while the proportion of individuals from Côte d'Ivoire grew from 8 per cent in 2017 to 22 per cent in 2020.

COUNTRY	2017	2018	2019	2020
GUINEA	13,839 (19%)	7,121 (16%)	2,676 (12%)	1,683 (14%)
NIGERIA	18,260 (26%)	1,395 (3%)	898 (4%)	542 (4%)
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	13,336 (19%)	3,552 (8%)	3,065 (13%)	2,701 (22%)
MALI	7,796 (11%)	6,717 (15%)	2,571 (11%)	1,597 (13%)

*Table 12. Number of irregular migrant arrivals to Europe of the top 4 nationalities from West and Central Africa and proportion amongst all arrivals of WCA nationals, by main country of arrival and year (2017-2020)<sup>176</sup>*

<sup>174</sup> An important note to be made here on the lack of a nationality breakdown for arrivals to Spain for October-December 2020, which was the most active period in term of arrivals from WCA to the Canary Islands, Spain. The figure of WCA arrivals to Europe is likely to be significantly affected by this missing data.

<sup>175</sup> IOM, *Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview (October – December 2020)*, February 2021.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.





**In 2020, 23,023 individuals landed irregularly on the Canary Islands, as compared to 2,698 in 2019**

## REOPENING OF THE WEST AFRICAN ATLANTIC ROUTE TO THE CANARY ISLANDS

A key trend observed in 2020 was the ‘reactivation’ of the West African Atlantic Route, which had been active in 2006 but had since been less used as migrants favoured crossing to mainland Europe over the Mediterranean. From late 2019, however, departures from West African coasts to the Spanish Canary Islands witnessed a steep increase. According to the Spanish Ministry of the Interior, 23,023 individuals landed irregularly on the Canary Islands, an increase of 20,336 individuals when compared to 2019 (2,698). The fourth quarter saw the biggest spike in arrivals, with numbers growing exponentially from October<sup>177</sup>.

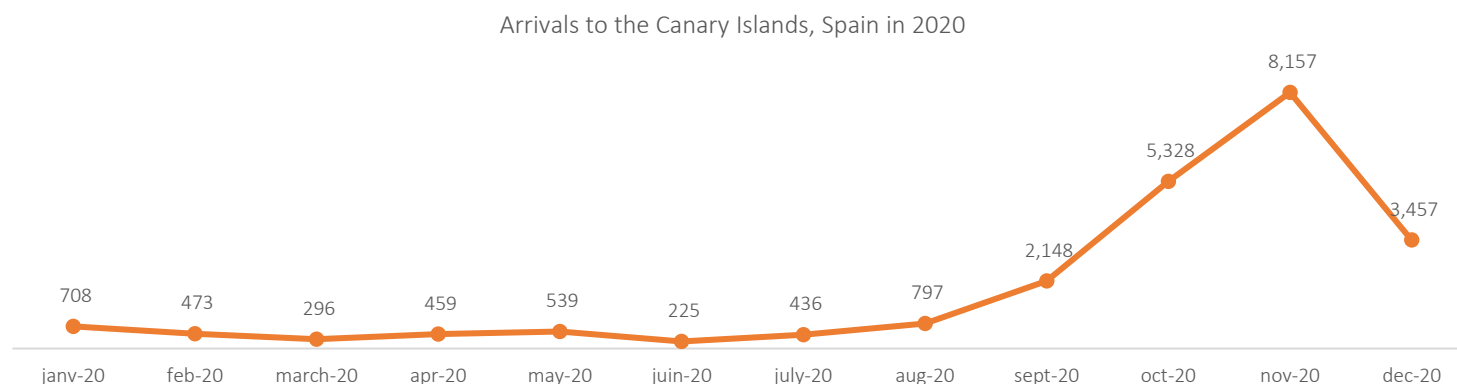


Figure 11. Monthly number of irregular migrant arrivals to the Canary Islands (Spain) in 2020<sup>178</sup>

This trend is corroborated by data collected by IOM along the Senegalese coasts, which between September and December 2020 identified 46 boat departures from Senegal on board which over 4,200 individuals departed<sup>179</sup>. An increase of 47 per cent in the number of potential migrants registered on lists over that same period suggests that this trend is likely to continue in 2021.

This increase was caused by the greater difficulty to travel along other migration routes, most notably within West and Central Africa where most official borders were closed for most of the year, or in Libya and Algeria, both of which implemented strict border closures in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, adopted stricter migratory policies, increased controls and conducted forced returns of migrants. The economic impact of COVID-19 may also have been a factor in the increase in crossings to the Canary Islands, forcing desperate young West and Central Africans

<sup>177</sup> Spanish Ministry of the Interior, *Informe quincenal sobre inmigración irregular: datos acumulados del 1 Enero al 31 Diciembre 2020*, January 2021.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> IOM Senegal, *Monitoring of Departure Areas: Movements to the Canary Islands (November – December 2020)*, March 2021.

to migrate at any cost. Surveys show that over half of Senegalese migrants who attempted the crossing to the Canary Islands were fishermen, whose income dwindled as a result of the pandemic and restrictions in mobility<sup>180</sup>.

Other factors, including evolving political considerations, which have encouraged migrants as well smugglers to find alternative routes, and the lower cost of the West African Atlantic Route for certain nationalities (Senegalese, Malian, Guinean) as compared with the Central Mediterranean and Western Mediterranean routes, may also have contributed in explaining this shift.

The increase in departures along this dangerous route was accompanied by an increase in deaths and disappearances. Twelve shipwrecks were recorded along the route in 2020, resulting in the deaths of 849 migrants, half of which were presumed drowning along the West African Atlantic Route<sup>181</sup>. As a point of comparison, in 2019, 16 shipwrecks caused the death of 210 migrants.

## PROFILE OF MIGRANTS TRAVELLING TO NORTH AFRICA AND EUROPE

The profiles of individuals travelling to regions outside West and Central Africa showed some similarities to that of internal migrants, but also some stark differences with the profiles of intraregional migrants.

Surveys conducted by IOM showed that similar shares of travellers were male, regardless of the intended region of destination (83%). In terms of marital status, a large share of migrants travelling to North Africa (68%) and an even larger share of travellers going to Europe (86%) were single; in addition, an overwhelming majority of migrants travelling to Europe (97%) and North Africa (90%) were young adults (aged 18-35), highlighting the fact that migration to these two regions, often dangerous and intended to be long-term, are usually conducted by young, single individuals. This contrasts with intraregional migrants, where the prevalence of circular, seasonal and short-term migration makes it more likely that migrants will be older and have families.

Although Nigerians represented large portions of migrants heading to West and Central Africa (13%), North Africa (26%) and Europe (24%), there were otherwise notable differences in the nationalities of migrants: significant shares of migrants travelling to Europe were from Guinea (24%) and Mali (18%), while they represented smaller shares of migrants travelling to North Africa or WCA. Meanwhile, Nigerian nationals represented a quarter of travellers going to North Africa (23%).

**Migrants heading to North Africa and Europe were younger, more highly educated and more likely to be single**

<sup>180</sup> Observatoire sénégalais des migrations, Policy Brief No. 01.01.2021, February 2021.

<sup>181</sup> IOM WCA, *Irregular Migration Routes to Europe : Western African Atlantic Route (2020)*, March 2021.



**Migrants heading to North Africa and Europe were more likely to be unemployed**

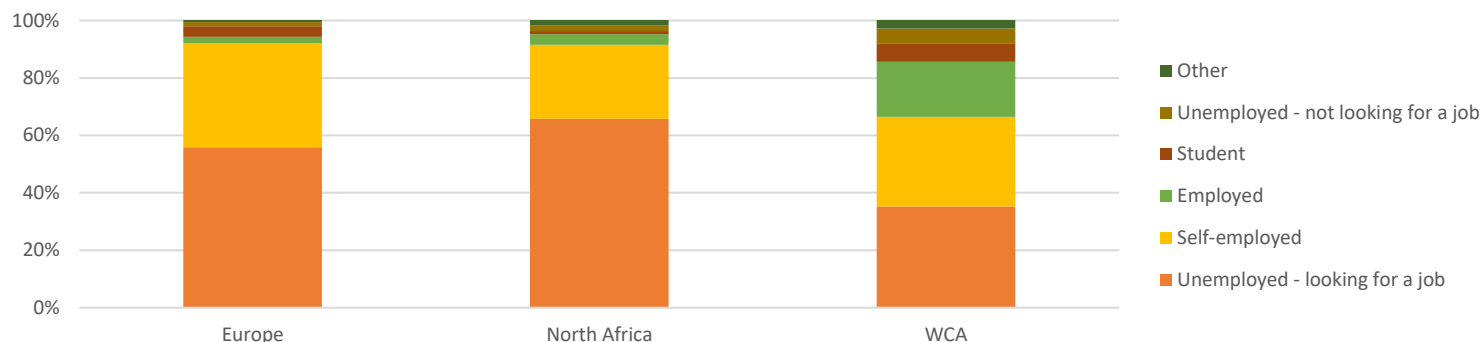


Figure 12. Employment status of travellers by intended final destination, in 2020<sup>182</sup>

Migrants heading to North Africa (66%) and Europe (56%) were more likely to be unemployed than their intraregional counterparts, indicating that larger shares of travellers were migrating to find work in these two regions and that the reasons for migration were less diverse. This is corroborated by the finding that almost all migrants going to Europe (96%) and North Africa (90%) were travelling in the search of livelihood opportunities. Interestingly, 4 per cent of migrants going to Europe were students, possibly highlighting the lack of prospects for high school and university graduates in West and Central Africa.

In terms of education, migrants going to Europe were more highly educated: a third (30%) completed secondary school (against 8% of intraregional migrants and 15% of migrants going to North Africa), while 9 per cent of Europe-bound migrants had not received any kind of education (29% of migrants in WCA and 19% of migrants to North Africa). Migrants going to Europe were also less likely to have gone to Koranic school (1%, in contrast to 20% of intraregional migrants).

**In 2020, IOM rescued 433 migrants in the Nigerian desert**

## RISKS AND CHALLENGES IN MIGRATION

Migrants face many risks, dangers and hazards over the course of the migration journey. These include exposure to exploitation, abuse and trafficking; bribery and extortion by government officials and smugglers; isolated and dangerous routes; perils at sea, including overcrowding and shipwrecks; and protection risks such as gender-based violence, kidnappings and robberies.

Migrants crossing the Sahara towards North African countries are particularly vulnerable and face increased risks. The vast, inhospitable and remote terrain raises the prospect of dehydration, sickness and lack of health care, being left stranded after a vehicle accident or landmine explosions, and exposure to high temperatures and bearing sun<sup>183</sup>. IOM Niger data shows that in 2020, 433 migrants were rescued during eight

<sup>182</sup> IOM WCA, *Flow Monitoring Survey Report (2018-2020)*, April 2021.

<sup>183</sup> Black, Julia, "Risks faced by migrants in the Sahara Desert", in IOM, *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean: Trends, Risk and Development*, 2020.



**Migrants heading to North Africa and Europe reported lack of shelter (24%), hunger (18%) and lack of financial resources (18%) as the main challenges faced**

Search and Rescue (SAR) Operations in the Sahara Desert, double the number rescued in 2019<sup>184</sup>. These factors are exacerbated by human-caused factors, primarily the increasing irregularization of migration, i.e. the greater use of irregular routes and the push of migration into clandestinity in the Saharan context, leading to violence, robbery, kidnapping and gender-based violence; instability and violence; abuse and exploitation by smugglers; and increased securitization of borders and crackdown on irregular migration, which have pushed migrants into invisibility and raised the dangers they face<sup>185</sup>.

Migrants interviewed by IOM reported the lack of shelter (24%), hunger (18%) and lack of financial resources (18%) as the main challenges encountered during their travels, pointing to the extremely rough conditions and the vulnerabilities to which many migrants are confronted during their journey. Many risks arise from the lack of documentation and the irregularity of their situation: 7 per cent and 4 per cent of travellers indicated being afraid of deportation and arbitrary arrests, respectively.

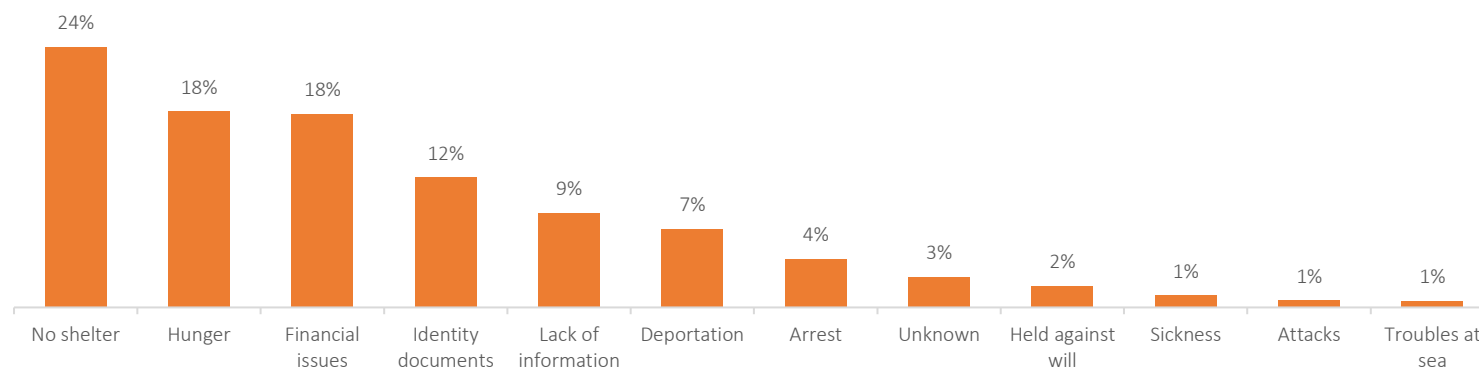


Figure 13. Challenges faced by migrants travelling from West and Central Africa to North Africa and Europe<sup>186</sup>

## MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES ON WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA MIGRATION ROUTES

Frequent accounts report deaths or disappearances of migrants along migratory routes from West and Central Africa, whether on their way to North Africa or at sea, during the crossing over the Mediterranean to continental Europe or on their way to Canary Islands. Daily, men, women and children die of dehydration, asphyxiation or drowning, a reality which reflects the hazards which migrants face along migration routes. From the Sahara Desert to the Atlantic Ocean, migrants do not hesitate to face high risks to their survival to reach certain destinations.

<sup>184</sup> It should be noted that SaR activities were restricted because of COVID-19 related mobility restrictions and that no SaR Operation was conducted in November and December 2020, and probably under-estimate the number of migrants stranded and in need of aid.

<sup>185</sup> Black, Julia, "Risks faced by migrants in the Sahara Desert", in IOM, *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean: Trends, Risk and Development*, 2020.

<sup>186</sup> IOM WCA, *Flow Monitoring Survey Report (2018-2020)*, April 2021.



**896 migrant deaths and disappearances were recorded in West and Central Africa in 2020**

In West and Central Africa and along the Western African Atlantic Route in 2020, 896 deaths and disappearances of migrant were recorded (involved in 38 incidents). 849 migrants died or disappeared along the West African Atlantic Route (WAAR), on their way to the Canary Islands, while 47 deaths and disappearances were recorded in a West and Central African country<sup>187</sup>.

In 2020, shipwrecks and other fatal maritime accidents affecting migrants took place along the West African Atlantic Route off the coast of Senegal (Mbour, St-Louis) Mauritania (Nouadhibou, Nouakchott), Morocco (Tan-Tan, Tarfaya, Guelmim), Western Sahara (Dakhla, Laâyoune). Shipwrecks also often happened nearly off the coast of all the islands in the Canaries (incl. Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Tenerife, El Hierro).

Apart from these shipwrecks, there are also other cases of deaths and disappearances recorded due to illness / lack of access to medical care, harsh environmental conditions / lack of adequate shelter, dehydration, and vehicle accidents in Niger and Chad. The Western and Central Mediterranean routes, both of which cross the Sahara Desert, continue to be deadly routes, with 14 disappearance or deaths in 2020 in Mali and Niger (199 in 2019).



*Boats on a beach in Senegal © Le Point/DR 2020*

<sup>187</sup> IOM WCA, *Irregular Migration Routes to Europe (January – December 2020)*, March 2021.

## FORCED RETURNS TO CHAD, MALI AND NIGER



**In 2020, over 23,000 migrants were forcibly returned from Algeria and Libya to Mali, Chad and Niger**

Mass expulsions, particularly from Northern African countries, intensified at the very start of the COVID-19 crisis, as governments realized borders would be sealed off and took the opportunity to crack down on irregular migration prior to the closure of borders. As international borders then shut down in the midst of the pandemic, mass expulsions were then suspended, before resuming in September 2020. In Algeria, these movements are conducted through both official convoys coordinated with the Nigerien government, by which Nigerien migrants are handed over to the Nigerien army, and unofficial movements, during which irregular foreign migrants are arrested, held in transit centres, and transferred by bus to *Point Zero*, a vast, remote and isolated zone at the border between Niger and Algeria, in often dangerous and inhumane conditions<sup>188</sup>. Meanwhile, Libya regularly returns migrants from south-eastern Libya to Chad.

In 2020, over 23,000 migrants were expelled from Algeria and Libya to Mali, Chad and Niger. In Chad, 1,108 migrants were sent from Libya to Ounianga Kébir<sup>189</sup>. According to IOM Niger, 26 official convoys to Niger were organized from Algeria in 2020, returning 13,829 individuals (mainly Nigerien nationals)<sup>190</sup>. In addition, in 2020, IOM Niger organized 35 Humanitarian Rescue Operations at *Point Zero*; these operations provided rescue and lifesaving assistance to 8,302 individuals.

Human Rights Watch estimates that, in the context of the establishment of a new national strategy on irregular migration, 16,000 individuals were, as of 8 October, forcibly returned from Algeria to Niger in 2020<sup>191</sup>.

## VOLUNTARY RETURN IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Voluntary returns, meanwhile, were significantly affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Throughout the period, States approached IOM for support with helping their nationals stranded in foreign countries to return home, but with border closures and other mobility restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and given the difficulties in responding to the challenges engendered by the crisis, operational complexity, lack of funding, travel restrictions, and the need to organize adequate quarantine upon arrival, very few Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) /Voluntary Humanitarian Returns (VHR) were recorded in most WCA countries from April to June 2020. Nevertheless, while voluntary return programmes slowed down, they never came to a full stop and processes were adapted to address the new challenges brought on by the COVID-19 crisis.

<sup>188</sup> IOM, UNHCR, *Mass Expulsions from Algeria and Eastern Libya: Background Paper and Points for Discussion*, December 2020.

<sup>189</sup> IOM Chad, *ETT Report 89*, January 2021.

<sup>190</sup> IOM Niger, *Algerian Official Convoys Dashboard*, December 2020.

<sup>191</sup> Human Rights Watch, *“Algeria: Migrants Asylum Seekers Forced Out”*, 9 October 2020.

**In 2020, IOM organized the voluntary return of more than 15,000 nationals of West and Central African countries**

**73% of beneficiaries of voluntary return were assisted to return from another country in West and Central Africa**

Travel restrictions stranded thousands of vulnerable migrants in need of assistance. Beneficiaries of AVR were thus unable to return home and had to wait in overcrowded transit centres, generating substantial frustration, creating tensions and increasing sanitary risks of migrants. As a result, IOM ensured continuity of care and service provision and search for innovative solutions to continue with identification, referral, psychosocial support, protection and direct assistance services for migrants exposed to violence, abuse, exploitation with increased risks. IOM reported that they were hosting 3,000 people in their transit and reception centres, where migrants spent extended amounts of time waiting for return. In Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali, IOM reported that they continued to accept migrants who requested assistance for voluntary return, and that they were hosted in transit centres with all measures taken to ensure COVID prevention measures. In this context, IOM successfully put in place humanitarian corridors in collaboration with governments in host countries and countries of origin to support stranded migrants with return assistance across the West and Central Africa region (more than 3,300 returns).

Returns from North Africa and Europe resumed in August 2020 with the partial borders opening in most West and Central Africa countries. In 2020 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) organized the voluntary return of more than 15,000 nationals of West and Central African countries. Two main countries of origin recorded more than 43 per cent of all AVRR and VHR towards West and Central Africa in 2020: Mali (3,248), and Guinea (3,144). In total, 20 country offices received migrants in their return. In 2017, Nigeria was the main of country of origin for AVRR and VHR assistances provided by IOM in the WCA region. Since 2018, this trend changed in favour of Mali which remains the main country of origin until 2020. Côte d'Ivoire is within the top 5 countries of origin since 2018.

MAIN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN BY YEAR AND % OF AVRR/VHR DURING THIS YEAR							
2017	%	2018	%	2019	%	2020	%
NIGERIA	25%	MALI	22%	MALI	23%	MALI	22%
GUINEA	16%	GUINEA	20%	NIGERIA	19%	GUINEA	21%
NIGER	12%	NIGERIA	14%	GUINEA	15%	NIGERIA	10%
SENEGAL	11%	CÔTE D'IVOIRE	9%	CÔTE D'IVOIRE	7%	SIERRA LEONE	8%
THE GAMBIA	9%	NIGER	7%	NIGER	7%	CÔTE D'IVOIRE	6%

*Table 13. Main countries of origin of migrant beneficiaries of AVRR/VHR, and proportion of all AVRR/VHR, by year (2017-2020)<sup>192</sup>*

Of the 15,000 individuals assisted in their return by IOM to their country of origin in WCA during in 2020, 73 per cent (or 10,936) were assisted to return from another country in West and Central Africa (mainly Niger). North Africa was the second main region of return for WCA individuals assisted in their return (23%, or 3,408 individuals assisted from a country in the region), mainly Libya. Returns from Europe represent a bit more than 3% of the total returns. The trend of returns from host countries is changing over the years from North Africa to West and Central Africa with WCA being the region with the highest number of returns since 2019. As a result of forced returns from Algeria, migrant favouring Niger as a transit country and scaling up of support programs, Niger became the main host countries for AVRR and VHR assistances in 2018 after Libya in 2017. This remained unchanged over years until 2020 with increasing proportion of the total return assistance in the region over years: 2017 (9%), 2018 (41%), 2019 (55%), 2020 (60%). In contrast, the same proportions for Libya are decreasing over years.

<sup>192</sup> IOM WCA, *Assistance to Voluntary and Humanitarian Return 2017—2020: Profiles of migrants assisted to return to their country of origin in West and Central Africa*, February 2021.

MAIN HOST COUNTRIES BY YEAR AND % OF AVRR/VHR DURING THIS YEAR							
2017	%	2018	%	2019	%	2020	%
LIBYA	69%	NIGER	41%	NIGER	55%	NIGER	60%
NIGER	19%	LIBYA	40%	LIBYA	24%	LIBYA	11%
MOROCCO	5%	MALI	5%	MALI	4%	MOROCCO	5%
TUNISIA	2%	ALGERIA	4%	MOROCCO	4%	ALGERIA	5%
GERMANY	1%	MOROCCO	4%	ALGERIA	3%	CHAD	3%

Table 14. Main host countries of migrant beneficiaries of AVRR/VHR, and proportion of all AVRR/VHR, by year (2017-2020<sup>193</sup>)



Migrants Assisted in their Voluntary return and reintegration ©IOM, 2019

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.





# DEFINITIONS

The West and Central Africa region, for IOM, is comprised of twenty-three countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, The Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo. The IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa is located in Dakar, Senegal.

## Definitions<sup>194</sup>

IOM defines a **migrant** as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.<sup>195</sup> An internally displaced person, or an IDP, is a persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.<sup>196</sup>

An **Internally Displaced Person (IDP)** is a person who has been forced or obliged to flee or to leave his or her home or place of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who has not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

A **Returnee (formerly displaced person)** is a person who was forcibly displaced and has since returned to his or her place of origin or habitual residence. A distinction is made between **former IDP Returnees**, who were previously internally displaced and have since returned to their place of habitual residence, and **Returnees from abroad**, who were previously displaced in a country other than their country of origin or habitual residence and have since returned to their place of habitual residence. The definition of Returnees from abroad differs between countries, and in some contexts includes individuals who were previously displaced in a country other than their country of origin or habitual residence and have since returned to their country of origin or habitual residence (but may have settled in a region, location or place other than their region, location or place of origin or habitual residence).

IOM's **Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)** is a system to track and monitor population mobility, including migration and forced displacement. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements, profiles and needs of displaced populations, whether on site or *en route*.

<sup>194</sup> See IOM, *Glossary on Migration*, 2019.

<sup>195</sup> IOM, *Who is a migrant?*, 2019.

<sup>196</sup> United Nations Commission on Human Rights, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (UN Doc E/ CN.4/1998/53/Add.2).

## DEFINITIONS

**Return migration** is, in the context of international migration, the movement of persons returning to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border. In the context of internal migration, it is the movement of persons returning to their place of habitual residence after having moved away from it.

A **Point of Entry** is an international border crossing point (whether an airport, over land, or over a body of water) at which officials are stationed to oversee the entry and exit of people and merchandise.

A **Land Border Point** is an international border crossing point on land, including rail.

A **Blue Border Point** is an international border crossing point on a sea, river or lake.

**Sexual Exploitation and Abuse** refers to any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another (sexual exploitation), or to the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions (sexual abuse).

**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence** refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It includes physical, emotional or psychological and sexual violence, and denial of resources or access to services. Violence includes threats of violence and coercion. SGBV may affect women, girls, men and boys.

**Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration** is the administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit and who decide to return to their country of origin.

**Search and Rescue Operations** are operations in Niger undertaken by IOM, in collaboration with Niger's General Directorate of Civil Protection (*Direction générale de la protection civile*, DGPC), to find and bring lost and stranded migrants to the nearest safe urban centre (Agadez, Arlit, Dirkou). Search and Rescue Operations are conducted both proactively (teams are dispatched along migration routes to search for migrants in distress) and reactively (in response to distress calls or information received) in the regions of Agadez, Arlit and Dirkou/Bilma.

**Humanitarian Rescue Operations** are operations conducted by IOM at *Point Zéro*, located at the border between Niger and Algeria, to provide lifesaving assistance to migrants transferred to *Point Zéro* by Algerian authorities, including transportation to Assamaka, emergency humanitarian first aid, water, food, and medical and psychosocial support.

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

**AVRR:** Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration

**CAR:** Central African Republic

**CMP:** Commission mouvements de populations

**CMR :** Central Mediterranean Route

**CONASUR:** Conseil national d'urgence et de réhabilitation

**COVID-19:** Coronavirus disease 2019

**DRC:** Democratic Republic of the Congo

**DTM:** Displacement Tracking Matrix

**ECCAS:** Economic Community of Central African States

**ECOWAS:** Economic Community of West African States

**FMP:** Flow Monitoring Point

**HRO:** Humanitarian Rescue Operation

**IDP:** Internally Displaced Person

**IDMC:** Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

**IOM:** International Organization for Migration

**LGA:** Local Government Area

**NSAG:** Non-State Armed Groups

**MMC:** Mixed Migration Centre

**OCHA:** United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**PPE:** Personal Protective Equipment

**RBM:** Réseau Billital Marobé **SARS-COV-2:** Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome  
Coronavirus 2

**SAR:** Search and Rescue Operation

**UNDESA:** United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

**UNHCR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

**VHR:** Voluntary Humanitarian Return

**WAAR:** West African Atlantic Route

**WCA:** West and Central Africa

**WHO:** World Health Organization

**WMR:** Western Mediterranean Route

# LIST OF CHARTS, GRAPHS, TABLES AND MAPS

## MAPS

- Map 1. Number of IDPs in the 9 countries hosting the largest IDP populations in West and Central Africa, in 2020
- Map 2. Distribution of the internally displaced population in the Lake Chad Basin, as of December 2020
- Map 3. Distribution of the internally displaced population in Central Sahel, as of December 2020
- Map 4. Distribution of the internally displaced population in the Central African Republic, as of December 2020
- Map 5. Distribution of the internally displaced population in Nigeria's North West and North Central Zones and Niger's Maradi Region, as of December 2020
- Map 6. Distribution of the internally displaced population displaced by Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis (North West and South West Regions), as of December 2020
- Map 7. Main migration routes in West and Central Africa
- Map 8. Operational status of Points of Entry in West and Central Africa, December 2020
- Map 9. Migrant stocks in West and Central Africa, in 2020
- Map 10. High labour mobility areas in West and Central Africa
- Map 11. Main transhumance routes in West and Central Africa
- Map 12. Locations of FMPs in the northern regions of Chad, Mali and Niger
- Map 13. Location of Flow Monitoring Points in West and Central Africa, in 2020

## CHARTS AND GRAPHS

- Figure A. Weekly number of travellers recorded at IOM's Flow Monitoring Points in 2020
- Figure B. Operational status of Points of Entry in West and Central Africa in April-May 2020 and December 2020
- Figure C. Irregular migrant arrivals to the Canary Islands in 2020
- Figure 1. Impact of COVID-19 on IDPs in West and Central Africa
- Figure 2. Prevention measures taken against COVID-19 in IDP-hosting locations in Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad
- Figure 3. Operational status of Points of Entry across West and Central Africa in April-May 2020 and December 2020
- Figure 4. Weekly number of travellers recorded at IOM's Flow Monitoring Points in 2020
- Figure 5. Impact of COVID-19 mobility restriction measures on traveller mobility in West and Central Africa
- Figure 6. Impact of COVID-19 mobility restriction measures on mobility and livelihood in West and Central Africa
- Figure 7. Immigration and Emigration in West and Central Africa, UNDESA 2020

## TABLES

Figure 8. Reasons of travel of travellers in West and Central Africa, in 2020

Figure 9. Regions of destination of travellers in Chad, Mali and Niger

Figure 10. Differences in the magnitudes of flows from West and Central Africa to North Africa and from North Africa to West and Central Africa, in 2018, 2019 and 2020

Figure 11. Monthly number of irregular migrant arrivals to the Canary Islands (Spain) in 2020

Figure 12. Employment Status of travellers by intended final destination, in 2020

Figure 13. Challenges faced by migrants travelling from West and Central Africa to North Africa and Europe

Figure 14. Number of migrant deaths and disappearances in West and Central Africa, by migration route and year, 2019-2020

## TABLES

Table 1. Number of IDPs in the Lake Chad Basin, as of December 2020

Table 2. Number of IDPs in Central Sahel, as of December 2020

Table 3. Number of IDPs in the Central African Republic, as of December 2020

Table 4. Number of IDPs in Nigeria's North West/North Central Zones and Niger's Maradi Region, as of December 2020

Table 5. Number of IDPs displaced by Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis (North West/South West Regions), as of December 2020

Table 6. Challenges encountered by travellers in West and Central Africa since the start of the COVID-19 crisis

Table 7. Impact of decreased remittances resulting from the COVID-19 crisis on migrants in West and Central Africa

Table 8. Regions of departure and intended destination regions of travellers in West and Central Africa in 2020

Table 9. Difference between movements from WCA to North Africa & movements from North Africa to WCA

Table 10. Total number of irregular migrant arrivals to Europe, by main country of arrival and year, 2017-2020

Table 11. Number of irregular migrant arrivals to Europe of migrants from West and Central Africa, and proportion of West and Central African nationals amongst total arrivals, by main country of arrival and year (2017-2020)

Table 12. Number of irregular migrant arrivals to Europe of the top 4 nationalities from West and Central Africa and proportion amongst all arrivals of WCA nationals, by main country of arrival and year (2017-2020)

Table 13. Main countries of origin of migrant beneficiaries of AVRR/VHR, and proportion of all AVRR/VHR, by year, 2017-2020

Table 14. Main host countries of migrant beneficiaries of AVRR/VHR, and proportion of all AVRR/VHR, by year, 2017-2020

# METHODOLOGIES

## FLOW MONITORING (IOM DTM)

---

COUNTRIES: BURKINA FASO, CAMEROON, CHAD, GUINEA, MALI, NIGER, NIGERIA, SENEGAL

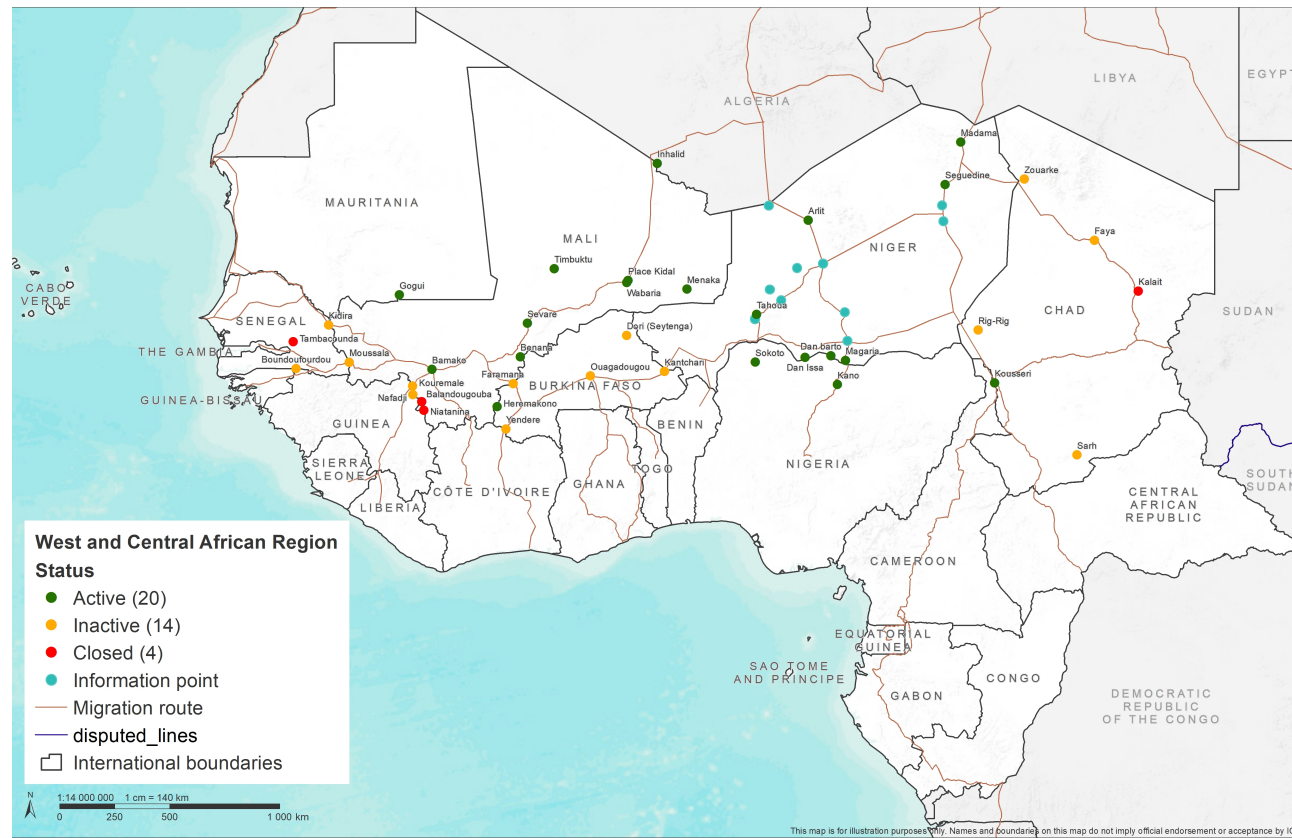
**Methodology:** The purpose of Flow Monitoring, a tool of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), is to provide regular and updated information mobility trends and flows and on the volume, profile, journey and intentions of mobile populations. The gathered information and analysis of data also contributes to improving and tailoring the provision of assistance to migrant populations.

Data is collected at Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs), key transit points, such as coach stations, rest stops and border crossing points, located in areas of high mobility. Consultations are first organized with national authorities to identify areas of high mobility. IOM, in coordination with local actors, then determine the locations at which to install FMPs. Data is collected at each FMP on a daily basis by a team of enumerators. Two sets of activities are conducted at FMPs:

- **Flow Monitoring Registry (FMR):** The Flow Monitoring Registry (FMR) collects quantitative data about the number of migrants crossing FMPs daily and basic profiles of flows, migrants' nationalities, sex and age, countries and cities of departure and next destinations. Enumerators collect data through interviews with Key Informants, including local authorities, border patrol agents, bus drivers, or local staff.
- **Flow Monitoring Survey (FMS):** The Flow Monitoring Survey (FMS) consists of individual interviews with a sample of migrants, chosen randomly amongst travellers crossing an FMP. FMS collects detailed information about the profile of migrants; their migration journeys; reasons and drivers of migration; intended final destination; challenges and obstacles faced; and future intentions aimed at capturing qualitative information about the profiles of migrants, migration drivers and migrants' needs.

In West and Central Africa, in the period 2017-2020, Flow Monitoring was conducted at 35 FMPs in 8 countries. During that time period, the Flow Monitoring Registry captured more than 6 million individual movements, while Flow Monitoring Surveys were conducted with over 170,000 travellers.

**Limits:** Flow Monitoring activities, conducted at a limited number of key transit points (FMPs), do not cover the entire West and Central Africa region. As such, the collected data only reflects the characteristics of flows crossing the FMPs; results are not indicative of movements in other non-monitored transit locations and cannot be generalized to the entire migrant and mobile populations in an area or country. Moreover, while data is collected on a daily basis, data collection only takes place during hours of peak activity, and some flows may therefore not be captured. Consequently, the combined results must be read as indicative of changes in flows and trends, rather than as an exact measurement of mobility.



Map 13. Location of Flow Monitoring Points in West and Central Africa, in 2020<sup>197</sup>

## EMERGENCY TRACKING TOOL (IOM DTM)

**COUNTRIES:** CAMEROON, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, CHAD, NIGERIA

**Methodology:** IOM DTM’s Emergency Tracking Tool (ETT) collects key data on events which provoke the displacement of populations, including number of people displaced, the location of displaced individuals, reason for displacement, intentions, priority needs and assistance received. When an event occurs, Key Informants contact DTM teams to share the available information. Data is collected as soon as possible after the occurrence of an event, so as to inform response.

<sup>197</sup> Exact location and operational status may vary.



**Limits:** The ETT is only activated once a threshold (i.e. minimum number of people displaced by an event) has been crossed and as such does not record every event. Because the data is provided by Key Informants, the information gathered may be inaccurate or incomplete. Furthermore, ETT assessments do not taken into account the longevity of displacement, and no follow-up assessment is conducted: individuals recorded as displaced during an ETT assessment may return home soon thereafter.

## MISSING MIGRANTS PROJECT (IOM GMDAC)<sup>198</sup>

---

**COUNTRIES:** BURKINA FASO, CHAD, MALI, MAURITANIA, NIGER, SENEGAL

**Methodology:** The Missing Migrants Project, a project of IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), counts migrants who have died at the external borders of states, or in the process of migration towards an international destination, regardless of their legal status. The Project records only those migrants who die during their journey to a country different from their country of residence.

Missing Migrants Project data include the deaths of migrants who die in transportation accidents, shipwrecks, violent attacks, or due to medical complications during their journeys. It also includes the number of corpses found at border crossings that are categorized as the bodies of migrants, on the basis of belongings and/or the characteristics of the death.

The Missing Migrants Project currently gathers information from diverse sources such as official records – including from coast guards and medical examiners – and other sources such as media reports, NGOs, and surveys and interviews of migrants. In the Mediterranean region, data are relayed from relevant national authorities to IOM field missions, who then share it with the Missing Migrants Project team. Data are also obtained by IOM and other organizations that receive survivors at landing points in Italy and Greece. IOM and UNHCR also regularly coordinate to validate data on missing migrants in the Mediterranean.

**Limits:** There are some limitations to the data available on deaths and disappearances during migration in West and Central Africa. The information available is sparse and rarely contains information on sex, age, and places of disappearance or death. Moreover, there is no perfectly harmonized data on the number of migrants missing, nor information on the families who are still looking for those lost during their migration.

## MOBILITY TRACKING (IOM DTM)<sup>199</sup>

---

**COUNTRIES:** CAMEROON, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, CHAD, MALI, MAURITANIA (MIGRANTS), NIGERIA.

**Methodology:** Mobility tracking, a tool of IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), collects regular and updated information about the numbers, types, location, profiles, multisectoral needs and vulnerabilities of forcibly displaced populations, including Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), former IDP Returnees and Returnees from abroad. It is designed to capture displacement dynamics and trends. DTM teams consult national and local authorities to establish the regions, locations and displacement sites hosting displaced populations. In each location, DTM enumerators collect data through direct observation, focus group discussion, and interviews with several Key Informants with intricate knowledge

---

<sup>198</sup> Missing Migrant Project, Methodology ([link](#))

<sup>199</sup> IOM, “Methodological Framework used in Displacement tracking matrix Operations for quantifying Displacement and Mobility”, 2017.

of the displacement situation, such as IDP representatives, site management, local authorities or NGO staff, to determine the numbers and profiles of displaced people in each location and collect key information on displaced people's access to basic goods and services, assistance received and multisectoral needs.

In West and Central Africa, Mobility Tracking is implemented in four crises: the Lake Chad Basin (Cameroon's Far North, Chad's Lac Province, Nigeria's North East Zone), Nigeria's North West/North Central crisis, the Central African Republic crisis, and the Central Sahel crisis (Mali).

Mobility Tracking is also utilized to ascertain the numbers, profiles, experiences and needs of migrant populations residing in a given area or city. Exercises of this sort are implemented in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou (Mauritania) as well as Kolenda (Guinea).

**Limits:** Numbers collected through Mobility Tracking should be read as estimates, and not exact figures. In addition, while the information collected is systematically triangulated and verified, data is mostly collected through interviews with Key Informants and may therefore be inaccurate or incomplete. Furthermore, logistical, security, physical access or political constraints sometimes restrict the coverage of Mobility Tracking exercises, limiting the completeness of data.

## MONITORING OF DEPARTURE AREAS (IOM DTM)<sup>200</sup>

---

COUNTRIES: SENEGAL

**Methodology:** IOM launched in 2020 in Senegal, a tool whose aim is to monitor the areas of departures in Senegal for migrants travelling along the Western African Atlantic Route (WAAR), to Mauritania, Morocco, or the Spanish Canary Islands. Data is collected on key events observed in departure areas, including departure of boats, shipwrecks, boat construction or enlisting of potential migrants, as well as the demographic profiles of departing migrants.

Trained community focal points provide enumerators with a variety of information, using a standard form on a smartphone, on events observed in departure areas along the Senegalese coastline. The methodology combines three tools:

- **Departure Monitoring:** The departure monitoring tool serves to document the organization and departure of boats along the West African Atlantic Route (WAAR), at specific locations along the West African coastline; to better quantify the migratory flows on this route; and to provide information on the frequency, number of travellers, types of boats and travel conditions.
- **Mapping of Departure Areas:** The purpose of this tool is to identify the main areas from which migrants depart when travelling along the Western African Atlantic Route (WAAR), to Mauritania, Morocco, or the Spanish Canary Islands. These areas are identified through consultations with national and local authorities as well as Community Focal Points (CFPs).
- **Counting:** This tool collects data on the numbers and profiles of migrants observed departing from Senegalese coasts, en route to Mauritania, Morocco, or the Spanish Canary Islands.

---

<sup>200</sup> IOM Senegal, "Monitoring of movements to the Canary Islands — Movements and Departures from Senegal (1—30 September 2020)"

**Limits:** Data on departures from the West African coasts remain insufficient and lack consistency and a harmonized approach. The existing data relate to arrivals (and vessels intercepted) to the Canary Islands and are collected by the Spanish government. They do not provide enough information on departures given the number of breakdowns and unreported cases of boats leaving certain coasts of Morocco to Senegal.

## POINT OF ENTRY ASSESSMENT (IOM DTM)<sup>201</sup>

---

COUNTRIES: REGION-WIDE

**Methodology:** The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected global mobility in complex and unprecedented ways in the form of various travel restrictions, suspension of air travel and border closures. To better understand this, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has developed a global mobility database to map these impacts on human mobility, across global, regional and country levels. Furthermore, COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations in camps and camp-like settings as well as exacerbated the vulnerabilities of mobile populations who may now be stranded owing to COVID-19 related mobility restrictions. This data is particularly important when addressing specific needs faced by migrants and mobile populations.

The IOM have initiated the following main activities:

- **COVID-19 Travel Restriction Monitoring** - This database provides daily reporting on the rapidly changing travel restrictions being imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This platform maps and analyzes the different countries, territories and areas (C/T/A) that are imposing restrictions, as well as those that are receiving restrictions. This analysis is developed by categorizing the different types of restriction into 14 categories, including whether it is a total or partial restriction on entry. This workstream uses secondary data sources such as the International Air Transport Association (IATA), media reports and direct information from IOM country missions.

With global mobility at a near standstill, more stringent restrictions and new exceptions to mobility have also been issued by Governments and authorities, to reflect this, DTM has also incorporated the analysis of exceptions to mobility restrictions such as repatriations, the mobility of humanitarian and medical experts, airline crew and so on to capture the changing dynamics of the COVID-19 global mobility context.

To effectively visualize this, drawing on the data from the COVID-19 Travel Restriction Monitoring database, the DTM team has developed an interactive travel restriction matrix to easily visualize the current status of travel restrictions that are imposed and received by all the countries, territories or areas simultaneously.

- **COVID-19 Country Points of Entry (PoE) Status Baseline Assessment** – IOM has developed a global mobility database mapping the status of different Points of Entry (PoE), globally. These include airports, land border crossing points (could be rail or road), 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, measures applied and the time frame, as well as the population category that may be affected by the restrictive measures. This workstream uses direct input from IOM missions and this dashboard displays regularly updated mobility restrictions at location level.

---

<sup>201</sup> Taken from : <https://migration.iom.int/mobility-impacts-covid-19-methodology>

- **Stranded Migrant Mapping** - To better understand how COVID-19 related mobility restrictions affect migrants and mobile populations, DTM is tracking information to provide a comprehensive overview of the different categories of migrants in precarious situations through direct IOM country sources and extensive media searches. The population types are the following:

Stranded Migrants are individuals unable to return as a result of mobility restrictions related to COVID-19. This could include economic migrants, students, temporary visa/work permit holders, or tourists. These populations may be seeking repatriation or assistance while remaining abroad.

Migrants repatriated or who returned to their country of origins/resident country are organized into the following subcategories:

Repatriated Migrants repatriation/assistance includes individuals that have returned to their country of origin or country of residence through Government repatriation efforts.

Returning Migrants are previously stranded individuals who have returned to country of origin/resident country by their own means.

Camps, Detention Centers or Camp-like Settings include populations who have been residing in transit centres, detention centres or camp/camp-like settings that have been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Other = categories that does not fall obviously into the three categories listed above, such as migrant laborers with work permits/visas.

## STABILITY INDEX (IOM DTM)<sup>202</sup>

COUNTRIES: CAMEROON, CHAD, NIGER, NIGERIA

**Methodology:** IOM launched the Stability Index (SI) in Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon in 2019, which measures levels of stability in areas that have been affected by conflict and displacement. The Stability Index measures relative levels of stability and analyses which factors were relatively more impactful on the decisions of population to remain in place or to move. The tool is used to inform transition and recovery programming to strengthen stability in regions affected by conflict and/or displacement.

In West and Central Africa, the SI is implemented in all four countries of the Lake Chad Basin (Cameroon's Far North, Chad's Lac Province, Nigeria's North East Zone and Niger's Diffa Region).

The Stability Index aims to provide evidence-based analysis to better capture persistent community vulnerabilities and grievances, and inform tailored interventions seeking to respond to these concerns. The SI aims to foster recovery and stability, lay the foundations for the sustainable return of displaced persons, and prevent additional forced displacement.

---

<sup>202</sup> IOM, "West and Central Africa — Stability Index — Cameroon and Nigeria (September 2019)", 2020

The Stability Index aims to measure the level of stability in a specific area with indicators on (a) livelihoods and basic services and (b) perceptions in terms of social cohesion, (c) and perceptions of security to create a location stability score (village, city, or neighbourhood).

This index measures the stability of the targeted area at regular intervals (i.e., every 6 months, or more frequent, depending on resources) which allows it to identify trends over time. The tool consists of a manageable number of indicators collected periodically by interviewing Key Informants in these communities. Specific indicators are selected based on relevant, recent quantitative and qualitative data.

## TRANSHUMANCE TRACKING TOOL (IOM DTM)<sup>203</sup>

---

**COUNTRIES:** BENIN, BURKINA FASO, CAMEROON, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, CHAD, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, GHANA, MALI, MAURITANIA, NIGER, TOGO

**Methodology:** The Transhumance Tracking Tool (TTT), a tool of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), aims to support, strengthen and harmonize cross-border transhumance monitoring implemented by herder associations linked to the Bilital Maroobé Network (RBM). The TTT collects key data on transhumance movement dynamics in West and Central Africa, with the aim of providing the information needed for the implementation of support programs for populations involved in transhumance. The TTT provide information on flows, trends and profiles of transhumance flows and informs on events and risks of conflicts linked to transhumance. The TTT is implemented on a continuous basis, allowing for the identification of transhumance patterns and mobility dynamics over time. Data is collected through a network of Key Informants present at the Transhumance Tracking Points (TTPs).

The methodology used in the context of the TTT is based on five tools:

- **Mapping:** This tool involved participatory mapping exercise with national authorities and organizations involved in transhumance. This exercise seeks to map transhumance routes (both official and unofficial) used by transhumant herders and their cattle, as well as identify the locations of resources, such as water points and grazing lands, and key transhumant infrastructure, such as veterinary centres. The mapping tool also serves to identify key transit points which transhumant cattle cross, at which Transhumant Tracking Points (TTPs) will be installed.
- **Counting:** The counting tool collects data on the numbers and types of animals, as well as the numbers and profiles of herders crossing TTPs. The counting tool also collects data on the direction, provenance and destination of transhumance flows. Enumerators posted at TTPs collect data through direct observation and interviews with heads of the herds.
- **Event tracking/Early warning:** The TTT established an early warning system, by which Key Informants alert DTM teams about notable events, including agropastoralist and communal conflicts, natural disasters and mass, sudden or unexpected movements of transhumant cattle. The purpose of the early warning system is to inform actions to mitigate or prevent adverse impacts of events related to transhumance. Information collected includes the type of event, actors involved, consequences of the event, for conflicts, whether the conflict was resolved and through which means, and possible steps to take to prevent and mitigate the effects of the event.

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

## METHODOLOGY

- **Surveys:** Surveys are implemented at individuals and household levels. They are conducted to obtain detailed information on a specific subject or theme. Through dedicated questionnaires, after simple random sampling, surveys are conducted with individuals or households in order to obtain more in-depth information on a specific subject, to establish a detailed profile of transhumant populations or to gather data on access to services during periods of transhumance.
- **Mapping of transhumance presence:** The mapping of transhumance presence tool makes it possible to locate, characterize and count herders and animals present in a specific area. This tool methodology is two-pronged: 1) regional workshops to map the regions of interest and gather information at the regional level and 2) data collection at the locality level from key informants including representatives of herders, local NGO workers, state workers or officials.

In West and Central Africa, the TTT is implemented along the border areas separating Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania) from coastal countries (Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo), as well as Cameroon and the Central African Republic.

This report was made possible with the generous support of:



**MiRAC**  
MIGRATION RESOURCE  
ALLOCATION COMMITTEE

IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa

Zone 3, Route des Almadies

Dakar BP16 838

Senegal

Tel: +221 33 689 62 00

Fax: +221 33 869 62 33

RO Dakar – Data & Research: [rodakar-dataresearch@iom.int](mailto:rodakar-dataresearch@iom.int)



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency