



# “SEE MIGRATION LIKE WATER”

AN ANALYSIS OF FLOW  
MONITORING SURVEY DATA  
ON MIGRATION FLOWS IN  
AND THROUGH WEST AND  
CENTRAL AFRICA



 **IOM**  
UN MIGRATION



**FXB Center**  
for Health & Human Rights  
at Harvard University

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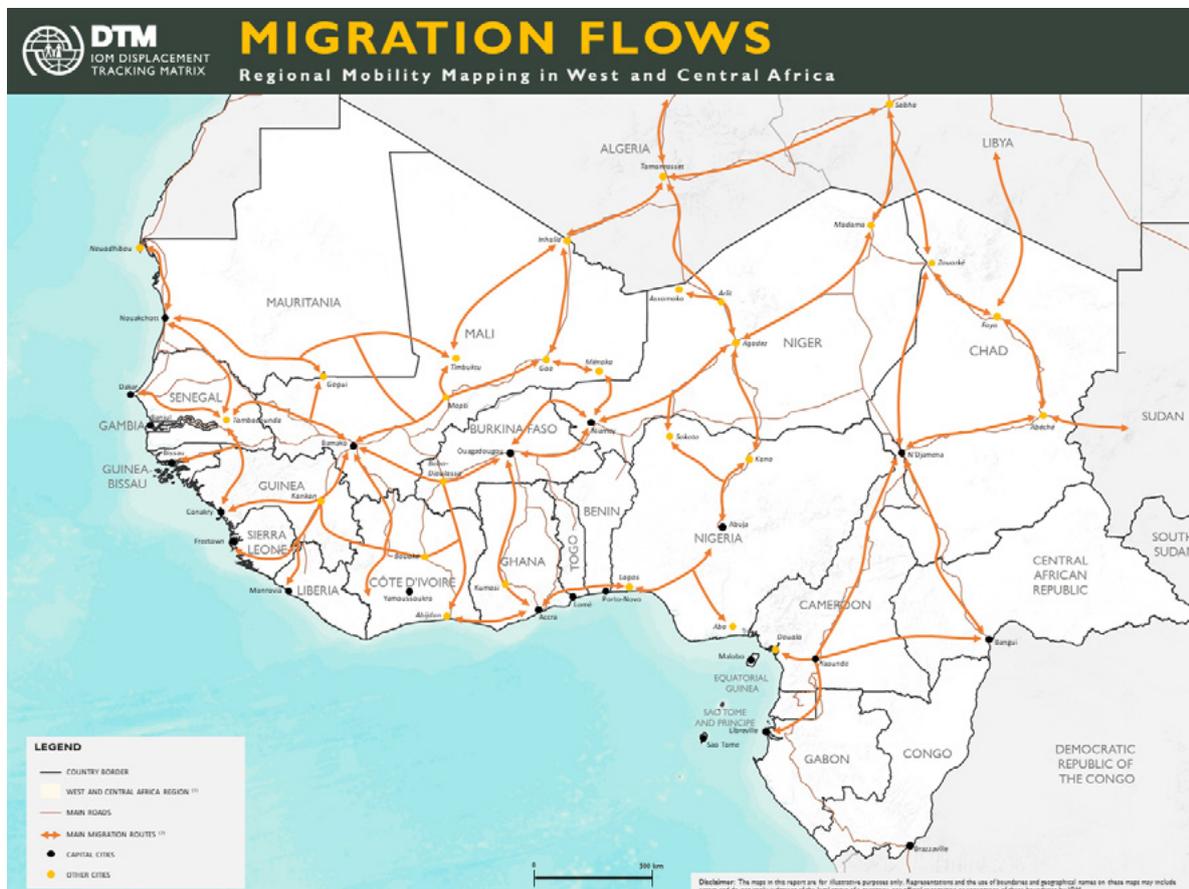
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# MAJOR MIGRATION ROUTES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA



Source: Prepared by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix Unit 2020.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

# ACRONYMS

CONASUR	National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (of Burkina Faso) (French: <i>Conseil National de Secours d'Urgence et de Rehabilitation</i> )
COVID-19	novel coronavirus disease 2019
DoMV	Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability
DoS	Department of State of the United States of America
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EAC	East African Community
FMS	flow monitoring survey
FMP	flow monitoring point
FXB Center	François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University
GMDAC	Global Migration Data Analysis Centre
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	internally displaced person
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LASSO	least absolute shrinkage and selection operator
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
RMMS	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

brain drain	“Depletion of human capital in a specific occupation or economic sector resulting from the emigration of skilled workers engaged in this occupation or sector from the country of origin to another country.” (IOM, 2019a, p. 20)
circular migration	“A form of migration in which people repeatedly move back and forth between two or more countries.” (IOM, 2019a, p. 27)
feminization of migration	“The changing nature of women’s migration, reflecting the fact that more women migrate independently rather than as members of a household, and are actively involved in employment.” (IOM, 2019a, p. 71)
flow monitoring point	Key points of origin, transit and destination of migration flows where data are collected. (IOM, 2020a)
flow monitoring survey	Individual surveys conducted at flow monitoring points with a sample of migrants transiting through each FMP. They capture migration trends as well as demographic and socioeconomic profiles of migrants transiting through each FMP. (IOM, 2020a)
low-skilled migrant	“Stages of the migration process encompassing departure from, in some cases transit through one or more States, immigration in the State of destination and return.” (IOM, 2019a, p. 124)
migration cycle	A series of stages in the migration process encompassing: (a) departure from (and, in some cases, transit through) one or more States, (b) immigration into the State of destination and (c) return.” (IOM, 2019a, p. 136)
remigration	“The movement of a person, who, after having returned to their country of origin, migrates again.” (IOM, 2019a, p. 168)
return migration	“Refers broadly to the act or process of going back. This could be within the territorial boundaries of a country, or from a host country to the country of origin. There are subcategories of return which can describe the way the return is implemented, e.g. voluntary, forced, assisted, and spontaneous return.” (IOM, 2019a, p. 183)
sustainable reintegration	“Reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity.” (IOM, 2017a, p. 3)
vulnerability	“Within a migration context, vulnerability is the limited capacity to avoid, resist, cope with, or recover from harm.” (IOM, 2019a, p. 225)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Human mobility is an inherent element of human development. In recent decades, this human imperative has frequently abutted against migration policy responses that limit access to safe and regular migration, even for sizeable constituencies for whom mobility represents an essential lifeline. Indeed, human mobility has been at the epicentre of an intensifying discussion on national security, which portrays much of mobility as a problematic threat to sovereign borders requiring firm management and restrictive regulation. As the COVID-19 pandemic leads to shutdowns of global migration pathways, the already limited safe and regular movement options have been further constrained, forcing people in need of migrating to either follow shadowy, irregular pathways or remain in overcrowded camps or transit points under precarious health and safety conditions. With the pandemic becoming an economic wrecking ball, poverty levels have increased and deep-seated inequalities within and between societies have been accelerating, generating both a public health crisis and a human rights crisis that will only increase the need for mobility, even as regular mobility options dwindle.

International law recognizes that all persons have human rights, which must be respected and protected. This normative framework extends to all people on the move, irrespective of their migration status. International law also provides international protection frameworks for well-established categories of people such as refugees and trafficked persons. Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States committed to facilitating orderly, safe and responsible migration and mobility while also eradicating forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking (SDG targets 8.7 and 10.7). The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, although a non-binding agreement, represents a significant commitment to address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration and to enhance international cooperation for the improvement of migration governance holistically and comprehensively.

Nevertheless, despite this normative framework and significant advances in recent years by States to plan concrete responses to ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration, protection measures often prove inadequate due to significant migration management capacity deficits at both the national and international levels. Migrants are often subject to harm, discrimination, abuse, exploitation, and other forms of human rights violations.

Strengthening and ensuring proper implementation of international protection frameworks must be a cornerstone of any response to ensure that the human rights of people on the move are upheld. However, this is not sufficient to respond to all the protection needs migrants may have, including those that may arise during extremely challenging journeys. Many migration routes within West and Central Africa – shared by the majority who are traveling within the region, as well as those destined for North Africa or Europe – are complex and multidimensional; often characterized as “mixed migration”. Under a mixed-migration lens, migrants can belong to more than one established protection category simultaneously or shift between categories while on the move, depending on the challenges they face and their capacity to overcome them. In addition to ensuring that rights to international protection are recognized and upheld, this complex reality needs to be addressed by operationalizing a contextualized analysis of individual vulnerability to identify migrants who have other protection needs at the early stages of their journey.

Protection measures have long been designed, with different levels of effectiveness, by governments to address the urgent needs that migrants face. However, the complexity and rapidly evolving characteristics of modern mobility, combined with the emergence of new threats and risks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have limited the efficacy of these frameworks, leaving many migrants unprotected. Evidence-based information about the risks and protective factors impacting migrants is critical to comprehend

such a multifaceted and rapidly evolving reality and to the design and implementation of targeted, comprehensive and sustainable small- and large-scale responses tailored to the needs of different groups of migrants.

The West and Central Africa region provides rich evidence of dynamic migration patterns, including long histories of diverse intraregional and interregional migration flows (IOM, 2020b), as well as severe protection gaps and challenges along popular migration routes (Adepoju, 2016). The region has the highest rate of both intraregional and extra-regional migration (Lombard, 2012), with 19.4 million intra-African migrants in 2018 alone (McAuliffe and Kitimbo, 2018). During the past two years, and in the face of these substantial movements, the African Union supported the efforts of the Regional Economic Communities, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC), to enhance regional integration by adopting a continent-wide protocol on free movement (African Union, 2017). However, migrants continue to face severe protection gaps, highlighting enduring and significant migration management capacity deficits at the national and regional levels (Adepoju, 2016).

This report calls for a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of migrant vulnerability across the most popular West and Central African migration routes – examining risk and protective factors at the individual, household, community and structural levels – to stimulate the development of prevention-based protection frameworks to assist migrants in need.

The report is based on an analysis of DTM flow monitoring survey (FMS) data gathered from 110,402 migrants of 73 different nationalities at 39 flow monitoring points (FMPs) (exit, entry and transit) in seven countries in West and Central Africa in 2018 and 2019 (namely, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal), as well as from qualitative data gathered from 11 expert interviews in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. It documents the varied and complex migration patterns occurring within West and Central Africa, the profiles of migrants, their ongoing experiences at numerous points along the migration routes, and the different protection issues and obstacles they face throughout the course of their journeys.

Driven by these data, this report aims to:

- (a) Generate an evidence-based analysis of the tightly interwoven geographic, cultural and economic patchwork that constitutes West and Central African migration for the benefit of IOM and other migration-related international organizations, the broader humanitarian community, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders;
- (b) Provide evidence-based programming recommendations on protection and assistance tailored to the specific needs, trajectories and vulnerabilities of migrants moving within and out of the region;
- (c) Advance viable harm prevention-based frameworks for assisting migrants in situations of increased vulnerability to harm, with a view to stimulating the development of policies that afford safe and regular migration opportunities for this constituency.

This report is part of the wider effort of IOM to collect and disseminate sound empirical data on migration dynamics and vulnerabilities in order to support progress towards enhancement of safe migration, including by supporting the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the realization the migration-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets.

The findings of this report emphasize the immediate and pressing need for a sustainable, multilayered, harm prevention-based strategy to protect migrants at a time when the mismatch between the existence of regular migration pathways and the need for mobility has become far too wide. As the world grapples with an emerging third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the highest levels of global inequality in human history, migration will continue to be a life-saving strategy for people. Human mobility, therefore, must be safe, accessible and inclusive if people are to survive.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 1. The vast majority of migrants opt to remain within the region.

A large majority (80.09%) of the study's respondents reported a country of the West and Central Africa region as their final destination, with only 19.37 per cent reporting Europe and less than 0.5 per cent reporting the Americas, Asia or Oceania.

### 2. The vast majority of migrants who were forcibly displaced in their home countries tend to remain on the continent.

Almost 9 out of 10 (87.75%) of respondents who were forcibly displaced from their homes intend to remain on the continent, while only 11.73 per cent identified Europe as their intended destination and less than 1 per cent planned to migrate to other continents. These migrants are less likely to embark upon long-distance journeys and more likely to remain close to their respective home countries than their non-forcibly displaced counterparts.

### 3. Children travelling without parents or an adult caregiver are more likely to travel alone, rather than in groups, compared to migrants over the age of 18.

Leaving a familiar and often protective environment – to embark on travel alone – places children in highly risky situations where their physical and psychological security and well-being can be threatened.

### 4. Almost half of the migrant women interviewed were travelling without a relative or family member.

Women travelled alone not only as a part of a family reunification strategy, but to seek better livelihood opportunities, as they were often the sole provider in their household. Many of these women would be alone at their destination and often had to leave their children behind.

### 5. The majority of the migrants reported using their savings to finance their journeys.

A third (66.76%) of the respondents mentioned that they financed their journey using their own savings. Prospective migrants often liquidate personal assets to secure funds – a strategy that can severely complicate return or future migration planning.

**6. The majority of the migrants who reported an intention to return home had migrated to improve their livelihoods.**

More than three quarters (78.14%) of those intending to return home had migrated seeking improved livelihood opportunities.

**7. Financial problems, documentation issues and limited access to food and shelter are the four most common challenges encountered across the migration routes under study.**

Among migrants who experienced difficulties and challenges, 42.76 per cent reported these to be financial problems; 40.92 per cent, issues with identity documentation; 38.99 per cent, food insecurity; and 38.94 per cent, lack of available shelter.

**8. Financial issues and food insecurity are the most common challenges reported by unaccompanied migrant children across the migration routes under study, followed by accommodation insecurity and documentation issues.**

Financial issues are one of the most common challenges, reported by 46.43 per cent of child migrants travelling alone, along with food and accommodation insecurity, reported by 46.43 per cent and 42.86 per cent, respectively. The need for financial resources to cover daily needs, including access to food and shelter while en route, or to finance the continuation of the journey forces children into illicit (and therefore dangerous) money-making activities, exposing them to deception, coercion, exploitation and abuse.

Documentation issues were mentioned by 28.57 per cent of child respondents. Lack of documentation leads to a series of interconnected protection gaps for children ranging from stressful (and often problematic) age assessments and prolonged detention, to limited access to available services – challenges that increase children’s vulnerability to abuse and exploitation (Terrio, 2015; UNICEF, 2002).

Drawing on data from multiple migration points and mixed migration flows, this large-scale study aimed to provide a dynamic and comprehensive understanding of West and Central African migration trends and migrant vulnerability in order to inform the design of targeted, inclusive, rights-centred responses and a more effective harm-prevention framework.

Targeted migration responses should focus on mitigating widespread risks and dangers and on addressing the multifaceted needs that migrants face across migration routes. These responses will not be effective if they do not consider the heterogeneity of migrants and the complexity of their mobility – both of which are factors that generate different risks, needs and vulnerabilities – even when migration routes and journey modalities are the same.

The following recommendations, anchored on the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, set out key actions for consideration by IOM and other international agencies engaged in responding to the protection challenges facing migrants, as well as national governments, in the context of West and Central African migration.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendation 1: Enhance access to support services along migration routes**

Improve access to essential services, such as health and legal assistance; establish open and accessible information points for migrants at transit points; and strengthen the provision of psychosocial services along migration routes.

### **Recommendation 2: Ensure and enhance the availability of pathways for regular migration**

Strengthen international cooperation and promote bilateral and multilateral agreements that will ensure safe, orderly and regular migration, expand access to work permits and options for labour and academic mobility and exchanges, ensure the availability of visas on humanitarian grounds, as well as access to rapid family reunification procedures.

### **Recommendation 3: Promote awareness-raising and access to information**

Finance and support national awareness-raising campaigns in origin countries to ensure that prospective migrants have access to accurate information, engage return migrants, publicize available opportunities and encourage seeking of information from official sources.

### **Recommendation 4: Invest in enhancing the capacity of agencies and governmental actors**

Provide all agencies, governmental actors and stakeholders with rigorous training in human rights principles, and share good practices.

### **Recommendation 5: Create livelihood opportunities in origin and neighbouring countries**

Create sustainable livelihood opportunities at the local and regional levels; ensure equal access to economic opportunities; provide skills development programmes; address unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape that prevent people from accessing job opportunities.

### **Recommendation 6: Ensure and enhance the availability of pathways for regular migration**

Ensure that return and readmission of migrants to their own country is safe, dignified and in full compliance with international human rights law; ensure that migrants have accurate and timely information about the return process; including about available return and reintegration programmes; ensure returnees have access to short-term support programmes; and ensure individual reintegration activities.

### **Recommendation 7: Collect accurate, disaggregated and in-depth data**

Conduct regular systematic studies on protection challenges that migrants face along the different migration routes.

### **Recommendation 8: Enhance efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate human trafficking in the region**

Ensure that counter-trafficking responses are incorporated in all humanitarian relief operations across the different routes; collaborate with governments at the policy and assistance levels; and increase prevention efforts.

**Recommendation 9: Foster collaboration and coordination among stakeholders and governments**

Foster coordination and collaboration between national governments, United Nations agencies and local NGOs by defining roles and responsibilities, minimizing redundancies, and maximizing constructive collaboration in providing services.





A small caravan of donkeys carrying water in cans in a sandstorm.

Due to a major drought in 2017, people in the Hodh El Chargui region of Mauritania have been receiving humanitarian assistance.

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# 1. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

## 1.1. BACKGROUND: MIGRATION PATTERNS WITHIN AND OUT OF WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Human mobility is an inherent element of human development. In recent decades, this human imperative has frequently abutted against migration policy responses that limit access to safe and regular migration, even for sizeable constituencies for whom mobility represents an essential lifeline. Indeed, human mobility has been at the epicentre of an intensifying discussion on national security, which casts much of mobility as a problematic threat to sovereign borders requiring firm management and restrictive regulation.

The African continent provides rich evidence of dynamic migration patterns, including long histories of diverse intraregional and interregional migration flows (IOM, 2020b). Within the continent as a whole, the West and Central African regions<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1) have the highest rates of both types of migration (Lombard, 2012). These two regions also exhibit the strongest continental migratory connections with North Africa (Bredeloup and Pliez, 2011).

Despite their density and complexity, these migration flows have somewhat been mischaracterized by recent European media reports as predominantly despair-driven and oriented towards interregional (primarily European) destinations. This is not an accurate picture. In reality, West and Central African migration consists mostly of regular intraregional movements that continue culturally and socially well-established mobility patterns.

Indeed, contemporary migration patterns present similarities to historical movements during the colonial period (Brachet, 2018; Robin, 2014); like those migrations, present-day flows in the region are affected by social and cultural ties, and by economic and migration policies. Present-day West and Central African migration is also responsive to strong recruitment agreements both within the region and in North Africa – a factor that generates a dynamic and changing set of migration patterns (Robin, 1996; Konseiga, 2005).

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1 In IOM geographic classification, West Africa and Central Africa two subregions making up the IOM region of West and Central Africa. In this report, West Africa and Central Africa are still referred to as regions (not subregions) in their own right.

Figure 1. The West and Central Africa region, showing IOM offices



Source: Prepared by the IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa based on Google Maps, April 2019.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

### 1.1.1. DRIVERS OF MIGRATION IN THE REGION

Migration is frequently mischaracterized as the outcome of the decision and behaviour of the individual. In reality, it is a multifaceted social phenomenon in which micro-, meso- and macro-level factors<sup>2</sup> interact in a complex and dynamic way before, during and after the migration event (Kurekova, 2010). These factors include evolving national and global circumstances, as well as changing migration policies and sociocultural attitudes in transit and destination countries. Because of the complex impacts of these interacting factors on migrants' decision-making, their migration trajectories and the outcomes of their journeys, linear push-pull explanatory models are reductive and flawed.

The drivers that feed and shape migration movements within and out of the West and Central Africa region conform to this complex and interactive pattern. Like migration drivers across the world, they are diverse, multifaceted and dynamic. They range from the search for basic societal needs, such as access to essential services (Bakewell and Bonfiglio, 2013) and protection from persistent humanitarian crises, to complex local customs and community practices, intertwined with economic motivations, political pressures and demographic factors (Fall, 2017). Given this complexity and its similarity to global migration drivers, it makes little sense to describe West and Central African migration flows as "exceptional" (Flahaux and de Haas, 2016). In succeeding sections, within the overall framework set out above which emphasizes the importance of multifactorial drivers of migration in any given context, we highlight some particularly prominent factors that contribute to migration in the West and Central Africa region.

<sup>2</sup> Micro-level factors include personal motivations, values, desires and expectancies. Meso-level factors include family and social ties. Macro-level factors include economic factors, social and cultural forces, and political, legal, natural and physical factors.

Figure 2. Political map of Central Africa



Source: Prepared by the IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa based on Google Maps, February 2021.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

In Central Africa, political instability fuelled by State conflicts over the use of the region's immense natural resources has long been a critical element in the migration ecology. Competition for control of the dense forests that cover a significant part of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and of mineral resources that include copper, gold, diamond, manganese and coltan found in Angola, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, has contributed to political instability and conflict, leading to coups d'état, interethnic confrontations, inter-State wars and, inevitably, deteriorating living conditions for citizens long after active conflicts have subsided (Flahaux and de Haas, 2016). On top of political instability, terrorist incursions from entities like Boko Haram have played a significant role in propelling migration in the region, displacing millions, particularly in Nigeria, the Niger, Chad and Cameroon (Dogru, 2020). To

these conflict-related factors must be added the impact of the quest for better livelihood opportunities – a quest that results from the declining economic performance of many countries in the region, including Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic (World Bank, 2017). This confluence of drivers belies any simple identification of a singular cause or purpose driving migration flows within and beyond the region.

By contrast with Central Africa, political instability and conflict, though not absent, features less prominently as contributory drivers of migration flows in West Africa (Figure 3). Rather, livelihood opportunity factors, and, in particular, high unemployment rates, appear to be key mobility determinants.

Figure 3. Political map of West Africa



Source: Prepared by the IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa based on Google Maps, February 2021.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

Chronic poverty and inequality, in relation to the distribution of wealth and income, contribute to the pressure that many people in West and Central Africa experience to search for viable livelihoods elsewhere (Torelli, 2018). In addition to these economic drivers, long-standing conflict outbreaks of violence and terrorism in Nigeria (DoS, 2019a), and the Niger and the recent conflict in Burkina Faso (DoS, 2019b) have contributed to deteriorating local security, forcing a significant number of people to become internally or externally displaced. In Burkina Faso, more than 1 million people have been internally displaced due to terrorist incursions (CONASUR, 2020). Political instability in countries like the Gambia and Guinea has weakened civil structure, by affecting access to basic services and pushing highly skilled workers to migrate (Bruni et al., 2017). Further, the challenge of health epidemics across the region over the years (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2014), combined with environmentally related food insecurity, has exacerbated migration flows (OECD, 2020a). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, over 21 million people across West Africa were estimated to be experiencing severe food shortages, a situation expected to worsen in the near future due to the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic (UN News, 2020).

Mali is an emblematic example illustrating how diverse drivers of migration can manifest even within a comparatively small country. Migration has long been considered a rite of passage for young Malian men – an important and viable livelihood strategy given the country’s limited capacity to offer economic opportunities. Environmental disasters, combined with political upheavals, including the enduring impact of the 2012 coup d’état and the armed rebellion in the northern part of the country, continue to depress the country’s economic and political stability, compounding the migration drivers affecting the population (Ortun et al., 2017; Schoumaker et al., 2013; IOM, 2008a).

### 1.1.2. INTENDED DESTINATION

Migration subsystems have evolved across the region and over the years in response to a range of economic dynamics (RMMS West Africa, 2017). Since the late 1980s, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire have emerged as popular destinations because of the labour opportunities associated with their commercial farms and mines. Senegal, by contrast, has strong and well-established trading networks and some agriculture opportunities, as does Nigeria, due to the country’s oil resources and industries (OECD and SWAC, 2006). Côte d’Ivoire has continued to be a popular destination for migrants and refugees from neighbouring countries for many years, despite the ongoing political instability in the country. In fact, according to data collected in 2019, Côte d’Ivoire and Nigeria were identified as two leading destination countries, hosting 2.5 million and 1.2 million migrants, respectively (UN DESA, 2019). The recent IOM analysis of data gathered from 35 FMPs in the region from 2017 to 2018 identified the Niger, Mali, Senegal and Nigeria as the top destination countries for migrants from West and Central Africa (DTM, 2019).

Economic dynamics have also shaped migration destinations in Central Africa: Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are popular destinations for labour migrants due to these countries’ oil windfall and lumber industry, while Chad and Cameroon host large populations of refugees fleeing from the Central African Republic (IOM, 2020b). Lastly, some North African countries remain appealing to West and Central African migrants despite the political instability and/or restrictive migration regimes there. Migrants heading towards North Africa tend to either remain in the region or attempt to move onto Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Migration movements within and out of West and Central Africa exist within a continuously changing context, driven by various and intertwined factors. Migration routes therefore change and adapt constantly: for example, the crises in Libya and Mali and the resulting regional insecurity have altered migration routes and patterns in the region (UNODC, 2016).

#### **Free movement regimes in the region**

The dominant European narrative portrays West and Central African migration as largely irregular and led by smugglers, who, can become human traffickers, as it primarily focuses on the Central Mediterranean migration corridor, thus cultivating an incomplete impression of migration flows in the regions. In reality, the majority of migrants migrate regularly and with valid travel documents (Flahaux and de Haas, 2016). An important factor reinforcing regular movement is the existence of two free movement regimes: (a) the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) free movement regime established in 1979 and (b) the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) protocol of free movement established in 1983. The ECOWAS free movement regime has significantly reduced barriers to movement for West Africans within the region and therefore facilitated regular migration. West African migrants can move through ECOWAS member States on either private or public transport (Molenaar and El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017), enter the Niger (one of the most significant transit and destination countries) without a visa, and remain in the country without additional documentation for 90 days (ECOWAS Commission, 1993).

Even though the ECOWAS freedom of movement regime is not uniformly implemented by all ECOWAS countries, resulting in some barriers to movement and distorting some migration patterns, it has reinforced regular migration within the region overall (RMMS, 2017). The implementation of the ECCAS protocol for free movement (for ECCAS citizens) remains incomplete; as a result, free movement within the Central African region has still not been fully achieved (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, n.d.).

Mobility restrictions apply to West African migrants intending to reach Algeria (and, eventually, Spain) and to those travelling through Mauritania, Western Sahara and Morocco en route to Europe via the Atlantic and Western Mediterranean routes. Although the latter route is not as popular as it was in 2006, its use is surging again, significantly increasing risks for the migrants who use them (IOM, 2015).

In sum, available evidence suggests that the majority of West and Central African migrants move regularly and on their own initiative, as opposed to being forcibly displaced. At the same time, large numbers of West and Central Africans who cannot migrate regularly have no option but to use smuggling networks – an interaction that significantly increases their vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and human trafficking. Migrants face a greater risk of interacting with these networks when attempting to enter the Maghreb and/or reach Europe (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017).

## 1.2. UNDERSTANDING MIGRANT PROTECTION AND VULNERABILITY TO RISKS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Regardless of their initial migration itinerary, migration status (regular versus irregular) or intended final destination, migrants moving within and out of the region share the same means and modes of travel. They converge on the same established migration routes as they make their way to their destination, very often travelling in the same cohorts and forming mixed migration flows.

### Text box 1. Mixed migration flows

Mixed flows have been defined as complex population movements, including migrants driven by different motivations. Unaccompanied minors, environmental migrants, smuggled persons, victims of trafficking and stranded migrants, among others, may also form part of a mixed flow (IOM, 2008b).

The principal characteristics of mixed migration flows include their irregular nature and the multiplicity of factors driving them, as well as the differentiated needs and profiles of the persons involved (IOM, 2019a).

Under a mixed-migration lens, migrants can belong to more than one category simultaneously or shift between categories while on the move, depending on the challenges they face and their capacity and ability to deal with difficulties (IOM, n.d.): for example, a West African individual can start as a regular migrant crossing through ECOWAS, turn into an irregular migrant while crossing the Niger–Libya border, fall victim to trafficking while attempting to negotiate means of payment to be smuggled across the Mediterranean, and become an asylum seeker in Europe if they manage to free themselves from the trafficking situation. Thus, different legal frameworks may apply to migrants following the same route or even to the same individuals at different stages of their journey. The mixed-migration lens has been widely introduced to correct unidimensional migration classification systems that map poorly onto the complex realities of human migration (Schuster, in: Triandafyllidou (ed.), 2015).

The conditions that migrants face during their journey, as well as the rights that they have access to depending on their migration status, impact their vulnerability to risks, challenges and dangers. While some conditions reduce vulnerability to harm, others increase it. Thus, access to regular migration

pathways; quality services, including legal advice; rights-respecting reception and inclusion procedures; and strong social networks tends to decrease migrant vulnerability to harm and risk. Conversely, restrictive and punitive migration policies; the elusiveness of the access to health and legal services; harsh detention facilities; and other degrading reception conditions have the opposite impact. The more the conditions undermine the capacity of migrants to cope with challenges, the more their vulnerability to harm increases. These conditions can intersect, coexist and change over time, diminishing or increasing their relative impacts and generating different types of harm and vulnerability (IOM, 2019b).

The impact of these conditions on a person’s vulnerability to harm or resilience depends on a range of structural, familial and individual factors (IOM, 2019b). Resilience and vulnerability theories have developed models that include ecological and contextual factors in order to better support migrants (Bradby et al., 2019), acknowledging that a migrant is situated within a family, community and society (IOM, 2019b) and travels through different contexts that can influence them in every step.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic not only introduced new challenges to migrants moving within and out of West and Central Africa but also exacerbated existing challenges (ILO et al., 2020), further increasing migrants’ vulnerability to harm regardless of migration status (regular versus irregular), travel status (alone versus in a group), resources or support networks.

**Text box 2. Migrants in situations of increased vulnerability to harm**

Vulnerability has been defined as the susceptibility to harm that results from the interaction of risk factors and the lack of support and resources available to individuals (Mechanic and Tanner, 2007). For the purposes of this study, migrants in situations of vulnerability to harm are defined as those “who are unable effectively to enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer’s heightened duty of care” (IOM, 2019b; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Global Migration Group (GMG, 2017).

This study draws on the Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability (DoMV)<sup>3</sup> model of IOM to discuss migrant vulnerability and resilience (IOM, 2019b). This approach considers the interaction between individual, familial, community and structural factors before, during and after a migration journey and their compounded impact(s) on the vulnerability and resilience of migrants.

The following sections present the prevalent structural, individual, familial and community factors that impact migrants moving within and out of the region and serves also as an introduction to the findings of this study.

**1.2.1. STRUCTURAL FACTORS**

**The regulatory framework**

The lack of regular migration pathways between West, Central and North Africa has pushed migrants to migrate irregularly, increasing their reliance on criminal networks and other migration facilitators, and exposing them to a set of challenges and dangers. These include violence and other forms of abuse and exploitation perpetrated by migration facilitators, as well as physical hazards encountered along routes used to circumvent border control. Among documented human rights violations are extrajudicial killings, extortion, torture, sexual violence and exploitation, human trafficking, kidnapping,

3 For more information about the model, see: “Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability”, in: IOM, 2019b.

family separation, protracted detention in inhumane conditions and forced labour (UNHCR, 2017; Digidiki and Bhabha, 2019a). The routes that migrants use to avoid being detected – particularly those that pass through the Sahara Desert – are characterized by increased migrant mortality. United Nations estimates highlight the increased risks generated by these new transit routes, contrasting them with the much more highly publicized danger of drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. According to data, for every migrant death in the Mediterranean, two migrants die trying to cross the Sahara Desert (Miles and Nebehay, 2017).

Regular migrants also face mobility-related challenges, derived in large part from irregular practices at checkpoints, particularly with respect to documentation related to onward migration (UNODC, 2019; RMMS West Africa, 2017; Brachet, 2005; Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 2000). According to a recent study in the Niger, irregular practices, such as demands for bribes by border control officials, are common in countries of the ECOWAS region: over 50 per cent of the study participants (much higher for some countries of origin) reported having to pay a bribe (Oliete Josa and Magrinyà, 2018). Migrants who embark on regular migration journeys can also become victims of human trafficking, where they fall prey to offers of mobility facilitation that claim to simplify or speed up the journey.

### **Access to services while en route**

The lack of transportation infrastructure along parts of routes that migrants take tends to increase their vulnerability to harm (Oliete Josa and Magrinyà, 2018). This gap, combined with the desire of many migrants to avoid administrative hindrances and harassment at multiple checkpoints – a result of countries' increasingly restrictive migration governance frameworks – reduce migrants' chances of crossing in a safe manner or receiving outside assistance and rescue in case of an emergency (Brachet, 2018). This challenge significantly increases when migrants attempt to leave the ECOWAS region and cross the Sahara Desert.

On the other hand, limited access to critical services like accommodation, food, information and/or medical care further increases their vulnerability to harm (UNHCR, 2016). Particularly for those taking unregulated routes, migrants on the move may not be able to access services because they are not available along their chosen route (WHO Regional Office for Africa, 2018) or face restricted access because of their limited resources, widespread discrimination, or, in the case of irregular migrants, their migration status.

Furthermore, challenges with accessing mobile networks and the Internet across migration routes tend to increase migrants' vulnerability to harm. Access to mobile networks and the Internet allows migrants to remain connected with their social networks, seek help and information, and circulate financial resources when needed – factors that boost their resilience. Connectivity is a critical survival tool for migrants while en route; therefore, the lack of it forces them to rely on questionable sources of help or forgo valuable outside assistance.

## **1.2.2. COMMUNITY FACTORS**

### **Social pressure**

In many countries throughout West and Central Africa, migration is constructed as a rite of passage into adulthood for young men (Loprete, 2016), as an obligation of youth to support their families or as a measure defining social success (Charrière and Frésia, 2018). Many young individuals migrate driven by an ethic of responsibility towards their families (Ba and Ndiaye, 2008). Others tend to be driven by the perceived success of their peers who have already migrated. Whichever construct of migration drives young West and Central African migrants, they feel constant pressure to complete their journey. In this regard, migrants cannot return home without achieving their goals (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2020). This

pressure increases migrants' vulnerability to dangers and challenges, as it can lead them to take more risks in order to succeed, prevent them from assessing their migration journey objectively, seek help from their social networks while en route, or force them to continue travelling rather than returning home due to the fear of being seen as a failure by their families or their broader community (RMMS West Africa, 2017).

### 1.2.3. FAMILIAL FACTORS

Family plays a significant role in a migrant's trajectory, either in a positive or negative way. Family factors include, but are not limited to, the socioeconomic status of the family prior to migration, the size of the family, and family ties and dynamics, as well as its history of safe or unsafe migration. Depending on its structure and dynamics, and the expectations and ties among its members, families can be a significant supportive factor for migrants along their journey, for example, by offering financial and/or psychological aid when needed and supporting the aspirations and decisions of the migrant – or they can be a risk factor by leaving the migrant without any support in times of need or distress (see, e.g.: IOM, 2019b).

#### **Social networks**

Social networks in the context of migration are sets of interpersonal ties that link migrants with relatives, friends, community members and/or peer groups abroad. Social networks tend to drive individuals' decision to migrate and return (Dako-Gyeke, 2015), and can be seen as either a risk or a protective factor, as they can determine the availability of resources and set expectations (Harbison, in: DeJong and Gardner (eds.), 1981). Social networks may increase pressure on migrants to succeed, facilitate exploitative practices (RMMS West Africa, 2017) or serve as a form of social capital that facilitates the migration journey. Strong social networks that span the region can serve as a source of valuable information and support when needed, provide financial resources, and/or facilitate access to services such as accommodation or even employment, significantly reducing migrants' vulnerability to dangers and harm.

### 1.2.4. INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Individual factors are considered critical in determining how resilient a migrant will be when facing specific challenges and risks. However, they are also critical because they strongly determine how migrants will respond to structural, community and societal factors driving and affecting their journey (IOM, 2019b).

#### **Age and gender**

Migration movements within and out of the region are diverse in terms of age and gender. They also include significant numbers of children (either accompanied or unaccompanied) and women. Although there is a tendency to view these women and children as victims of migration – as migrants without any agency (Bisong, 2019) – studies show that many women and children in West and Central Africa participate actively in the migration decision-making process (e.g. Bisong, 2019; RMMS West Africa, 2017; Awumbila, 2015). The growing involvement of young people in migration and the challenges they face en route (including abuse, exploitation and violence) have highlighted the lack of appropriate protection policies within current migration management structures (Bisong, 2019; Africa Caribbean Pacific (ACP) Observatory on Migration, 2012).

#### **Financing the journey**

Financial resources are critical to ensuring migrants' access to valuable services while en route. Where these resources are not available to migrants prior to departure, they may have to be secured in return

for labour or sexual services en route – income generation strategies that frequently expose migrants to serious abuse and exploitation (RMMS, 2017). Other risks arise where resources to support migration are secured by liquidating family assets, borrowing from social networks or taking out loans from informal lenders. In many such cases, these arrangements generate severe repayment pressures, which, in turn, can lead to fears of negative social reactions when repayment schedules are not met (Dako-Gyeke, 2015).

### 1.3. AN UNFORESEEN NEW CHALLENGE: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing mitigation measures adopted by countries worldwide have become an additional risk factor for migrants on the move. The first case of COVID-19 on the African continent was recorded on 14 February 2020, and since then the pathogen has spread across 52 African countries, with cases being reported in both big cities and many rural areas. The number of cases in the West and Central Africa region is in the thousands,<sup>4</sup> with the full scope and impact of the pandemic still unclear due to data challenges and underreporting from official sources (OECD, 2020b).

The pandemic has greatly increased the mobility challenges that migrants face (DTM, 2020); Yayboke, 2020) – even within the West and Central Africa region (DTM, 2020), where movement is largely free and regular. The closure of borders to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has paralysed both regular and irregular migration (ILO et al., 2020) with severe human rights implications: migration routes have been blocked (ILO et al., 2020); migrants have found themselves trapped at borders, unable to reach their destination or return home (DTM, 2020); and basic transit services have been overwhelmed due to the increased number of people in need (DTM, 2020). Recent research suggests that migrants are also exposed to increased discrimination from local populations who perceive them as carriers of COVID-19 and, therefore, a risk to their communities (ILO et al., 2020). While many governments have put a halt to forced returns during this time, rushed and disorganized returns reportedly still took place and were presented as an essential public health measure to protect local societies from the pandemic. Migrants are still facing deportations and pushbacks or are even abandoned in the deserts of northern Niger, Mali and Chad (IOM, 2020c).

As of July 2020, more than 30,000 migrants were stranded at borders within the region, with more than 2,000 awaiting assistance in already overwhelmed transit centres (ILO et al., 2020). The risk of infection for these migrants is significant, as they have to remain in overcrowded centres, with limited ability to maintain social distancing. According to recent reports, the desperation of stranded migrants to continue their journey through regular pathways has led some to choose alternative and dangerous migration routes, in some cases relying on smugglers, making them more vulnerable to risks such as abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the risks irregular migrants face in the broader region have significantly increased, as now irregular migrants are being abandoned by criminal networks in dangerous areas given increased border control in the region. According to various organizations, the pandemic has significantly increased the risks faced by irregular migrants in the region because smugglers and traffickers have abandoned many of them in the Sahara Desert instead of taking them to their destinations (ILO et al., 2020).

It is apparent that, for migrants in many contexts, the pandemic is not just a public health but also a human rights crisis that exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and exposes social protection failures. Already the COVID-19 risk index of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) lists two major transit countries in the region, Burkina Faso and Chad, among the 10 most at risk given their limited capacity (IOM, 2020d).

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4 More data can be found at [www.worldometers.info/coronavirus](http://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus).

## 1.4. THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

Protection frameworks have long been designed by governments to address the urgent needs of migrants moving within and out of West and Central Africa (Abebe, 2017). However, the complexity and rapidly evolving characteristics of modern mobility, combined with the emergence of new threats and risks in the region, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and terrorist incursions, have undermined the efficacy of these frameworks, leaving many migrants unprotected. Evidence-based information about risks and protective factors impacting migrants is a critical tool for designing and implementing targeted, comprehensive and sustainable small- and large-scale responses tailored to the needs of different groups of West and Central African migrants.

Collecting migration data from many West and Central African countries is a challenging task for local governments due to a wide range of barriers. Despite efforts to aggregate data on migration flows, many countries in the region (and the continent in general) lack necessary statistical sources (Mosler Vidal, 2019). Where statistical sources do exist, the lack of standardized definitions and methods for collecting migration data severely hinders the harmonization of the data produced, complicating the effort to generate conclusions (Mosler Vidal, 2019). Violence and political instability in the region further increase the operational and methodological challenges of collecting data within migrant constituencies (IOM, 2017b).

The absence of effective collaboration and coordination among the various actors and agencies collecting migration data in the region, as well as funding inadequacies, further hamper data collection efforts (Mosler Vidal, 2019). At present, most of the data on migration patterns and dynamics of West and Central African migrants are drawn from those who reach destination countries, leaving out the experiences of migrants still en route, those who decide to stay in transit areas and those who are blocked early on in their journeys (Townsend and Oomen, 2015). This section aims to present some key gaps and challenges affecting data collection in the region. However, a more thorough discussion is needed to understand these gaps and challenges beyond the scope of this report.

Despite the gaps and challenges, coordinated and innovative efforts are already underway to improve the collection of sound, empirical data on the scope, patterns and dynamics of migration flows within and out of the region. The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) of IOM systematically collects data on migrants' profiles at numerous key points along West and Central African migration routes, providing one of the largest data sets assembled on migrants within the region. The DTM still faces a series of gaps and limitations (for a more specific list of the limitations of this method, see [Chapter 2: Methodological Challenges and Limitations](#)); however, it has succeeded in avoiding the common bias plaguing data collection focused only on migrants who are able to reach their destination countries, in harmonizing the data collected across the region, and in creating a robust basis for developing an inclusive and targeted harm-prevention migration framework.

The current study analyses FMS data from the DTM to document the varied and complex migration patterns occurring within West and Central Africa in 2018 and 2019. It is part of the wider effort of IOM to collect and disseminate sound empirical data on migration dynamics and vulnerabilities in order to support progress towards enhancement of safe migration, including through the realization of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and migration-related SDG goals and targets. Its ultimate goal is to provide IOM, West and Central African governments, and other organizations with evidence-based programming recommendations on protection and assistance tailored to the specific needs, trajectories and vulnerabilities of migrants moving within and out of the region, and advance viable harm prevention-based frameworks for assisting distressed migrants.

The collateral effects of Boko Haram in the Niger: IDPs from N'gourtoua.

© IOM 2016 / Moayad ZAGHDANI



## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In late 2019, the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University was commissioned by IOM to analyse data gathered from the FMS in 2018 and 2019. The FMS was conducted within separate DTM operations in regions covering the West and Central African migration routes, in whole or in part. To complement this data set and provide a richer ecological context for the quantitative findings, the FXB Center conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 experts operating in IOM field offices across West and Central African migration routes. The thick and thin data gathered from these groups supported cross-verification of the report's main themes.

A comprehensive literature review of West and Central African migration, child migrant protection, migrant vulnerabilities across the West and Central African migration routes, as well as migration management policies in West, Central and North Africa, as well as Europe, that directly impinge on West and Central Africa migrants' movements, framed and informed the report's analysis. The review also informed the design of the guide used for the expert interviews.

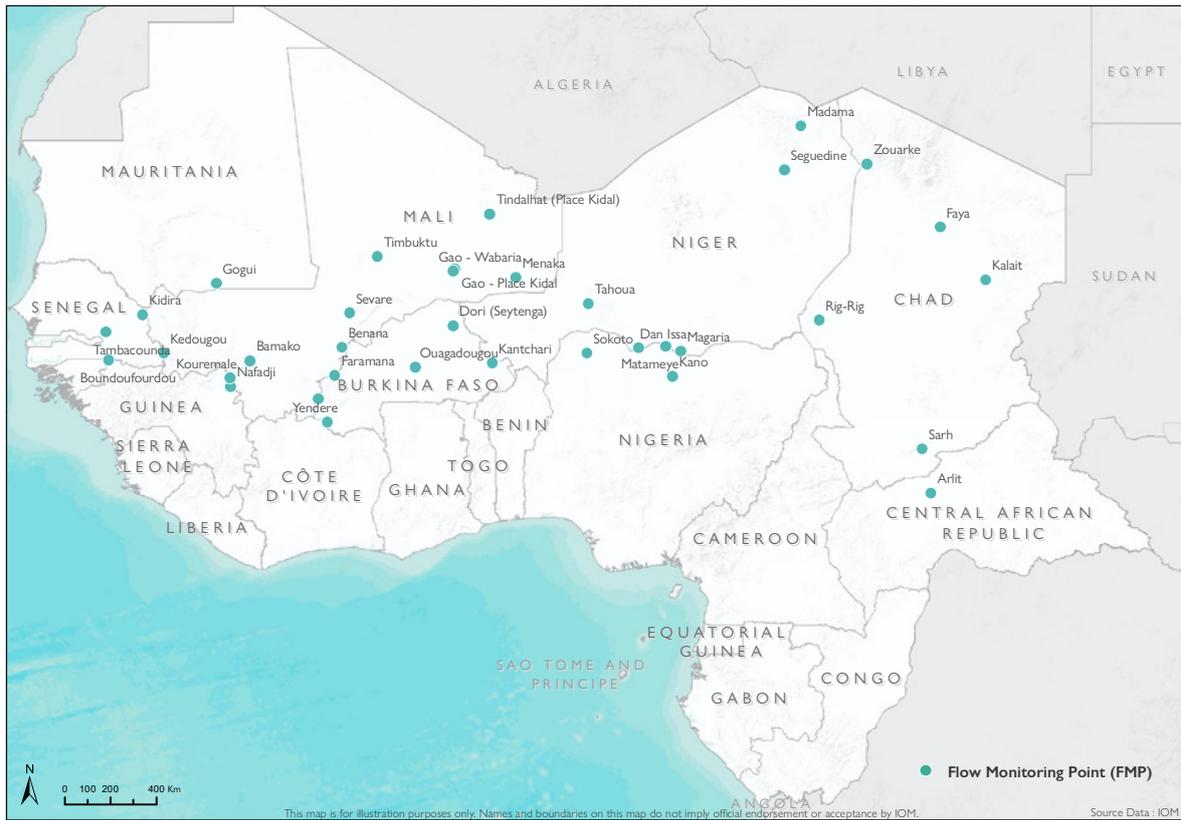
### 2.2. RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

Data was collected throughout 2018 and 2019 in 7 countries of West and Central Africa (Chad, the Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea and Senegal) at approximately 34 FMPs, although this number varied during the time of data collection (Figure 4). These points were selected by IOM, with the support of national authorities, because they were significant entry and exit or critical transit points for countries affected by migration. Locations near borders or in large cities tended to capture information from cross-border travellers, while FMPs in other sites predominantly cover information on internal migrants, though there are overlaps. The data thus yielded information on both cross-border and intra-country migration flows, and on long-term, short-term, seasonal and circular migration flows.



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Figure 4. Flow monitoring points across West and Central Africa



Source: Prepared by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix Unit 2020.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

### 2.2.1. QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

Quantitative data were collected from 44,867 migrants in 2018 and 65,535 in 2019 crossing the above FMPs, bringing the total number of respondents to 110,402. The two data sets were then merged to allow for the examination of differences between a two-year period. This large data set included migrant men and women of 73 nationalities between the ages of 14 and 89, with a mean age of 29 years. For the needs of this study, a systematic sampling methodology was employed. Migrants at each FMP were approached at random for survey data collection with their consent; every  $n$ th migrant thereafter was surveyed, with the interval  $n$  determined prior to starting and adapted based on the flow monitoring registry (the number of migrants crossing the FMP in a month), with the objective of reaching a total of 300 interviews per FMP every three months. The same sampling technique was used across all FMPs for the whole duration of the study.

Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous; no personal information that could make the respondent identifiable was asked. Data was collected in a private setting to protect participants' privacy. Data collection procedures were fully compliant with the IOM Data Protection Principles, the IOM Data Protection Manual and IOM guidelines on the participation of vulnerable people in research (IOM, 2020e). Prior to data collection, verbal consent was obtained from all participants and, where possible, from legal guardians in the case of children (all of whom were over the age of 14).

Questions included in the survey tool covered a wide range of topics documenting the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of migrants, as well as their unmet needs and journey trajectories, the main reasons behind their decision to migrate, their migration histories, immediate future intentions (including plans for return), difficulties faced along the migration routes, and the types of information and assistance they needed while en route. The survey tool was pilot-tested in Mali in 2017 and further refined. A total of 105 IOM staff members with extensive experience working with migrants in situations of increased vulnerability were recruited as enumerators for the data collection.

During data analysis, respondents were divided into four age groups (14–24, 25–34, 35–64 and 65+ years old), in order to study the experiences of young and older people separately and examine differences that may exist between these age groups. These age groups were chosen based on the United Nations definition of youth.<sup>5</sup> For limited analyses, the 14–24 youth group was further divided into two subgroups (14–17 and 18–24 years old) to disaggregate the experiences of migrant children from those of the youth group as a whole. Differences between populations presented in this study were tested using a mix of parametric and non-parametric tests, including Pearson correlation ( $r$ ), Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) and Spearman correlation ( $\rho$ ), with significance tested at  $p = 0.05$ . Multivariable regression analyses<sup>6</sup> to examine the vulnerability of migrants to harm were also included to identify independent factors (controlling for other characteristics) that have an effect on migrant vulnerability. Given the focused scope of migrant survey-sampling in the DTM data set, the findings from this study have limited external generalizability to all migrants moving within and out of the region, and do not represent a full picture of intraregional and interregional migration. However, the volume and dimensionality of the data set itself collected across different key flow points represents a significant contribution to the understanding of migration patterns and dynamics in the area (for a more thorough discussion see [Subchapter 2.3: Methodological challenges and limitations](#)).

### 2.2.2. QUALITATIVE DATA

Employing expert sampling methodology, 11 experts expected to “yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (Patton, 2015) were approached. Semi-structured interviews with IOM staff members located in different country offices across the region were facilitated by IOM and conducted virtually by the FXB Center research team in English. The interviews focused on current migration trends observed in the region, the difficulties and dangers faced by migrants along the West and Central African routes, risk and protective factors associated with their vulnerability, and their resilience to harm and exploitation, as well as current IOM and government efforts to prevent harm. Experts were asked for their recommendations and suggestions on steps they believed were needed to develop a holistic harm prevention framework. As interviews were conducted during State-imposed measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, experts were also asked to discuss the impact of the pandemic on migrants’ mobility and well-being.

During qualitative data analysis, a tentative thematic coding scheme was developed based on the main themes that surfaced during the interviews. Data was further analysed to identify secondary themes and topics.

5 “The United Nations defines those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth without prejudice to other definitions by Members States.” (United Nations, 1981)

6 Linear regression analysis is a predictive analysis that allows researchers to explain the relationship, if any, between one dependent and multiple independent variables, and the effect that independent variables have on the dependent. (For more information about linear regression, see, e.g.: Statistics Solutions, 2020.)

## 2.3. METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

This study collected data from migrants who were on the move in West and Central Africa in 2018 and 2019 – a period during which migration policy in the region and the whole continent, in general, began shifting: African countries endorsed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to address migration in all its facets and include migration in their national development strategies, as the African Union sought to address migration in a more integrated manner through “comprehensive, human-rights based and gender-responsive national migration strategies and policies” (Le Coz and Pietropolli, 2020). It follows that the findings presented in this report are most relevant to this time period only.

Besides the common challenges that data collection faces in the region (as mentioned in [Subchapter 1.3: An unforeseen new challenge: The impact of COVID-19](#)), this study also faced a series of ethical challenges that had an impact on the effort to fully comprehend migration dynamics and challenges in the region. More specifically, following research ethics principles, all children under the age of 14 were excluded from the study. This eliminated data from a group highly vulnerable to harm with distinctive migration trajectories, protection needs and susceptibilities to exploitation and other risks. Furthermore, the research tool did not include questions directly addressing exposure to exploitation, abuse and violence or related risks. Following general do-no-harm principles, as well as IOM and protection information management guidelines on the participation of vulnerable people in research, questions addressing challenges and difficulties while en route were asked only in instances where a referral mechanism<sup>7</sup> existed to aid respondents who needed it. As there were no adequate referral systems along many popular routes in the region, these types of questions were not directed at more than 80 per cent of the respondents for safety reasons. This protection measure limits the scope for a holistic understanding of the challenges and risks migrants face along particular routes.

Although the total number of survey respondents was large, at 110,402 individuals, the collected data also had a high amount of missingness, attributable to both the volume of conditional questions (the asking of one question was conditional on the response to a previous question), and the number of respondents that either withheld responses, reported that they did not know the answer, or providing an answer outside the scope of the response options that could not be mapped back to any of the predetermined response categories after steps were taken in the data-processing pipeline to address variations in response dialect and standardize free-text responses. All results presented in this analysis are in relation to *all respondents of that question itself* and not the overall sample, and do not include missing responses, resulting in different absolute counts of respondents with corresponding relative response rates across questions.

In general, despite the rigorous methodological safeguards adopted during data collection, the sample cannot be considered a representative one, because the total number of migrants travelling along the various routes cannot be accurately estimated or ascertained. Furthermore, this study does not cover all migration routes within West and Central Africa; therefore, the findings generated cannot and should not be generalized to all migrants moving within the region. As flows are fluid, it is important to consider that the data collected provide a partial picture of the migration dynamics in the region and conclusions should not be derived about migration flows and dynamics in areas without FMPs.

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<sup>7</sup> Referral is the process of noticing a concern about the respondent, deciding that action should be taken for their safety and protection, and reporting this concern to those with a responsibility to provide assistance (Roelen and Edström, 2012).





A truck packed with migrants heading for Libya crosses Agadez on its way to the Nigerian village of Tourayat. The town of Agadez in the Sahara is a hub for West African migrants travelling to Libya, Algeria and Europe. A trip from Tourayat to Libya on this type of truck can take more than two days. In 2015, IOM registered and assisted more than 7,000 migrants (from the Niger, as well as third-country nationals).

# 3. UNDERSTANDING WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICAN MIGRATION

## 3.1. PROFILE OF MIGRANTS: WHO, HOW AND WHY?

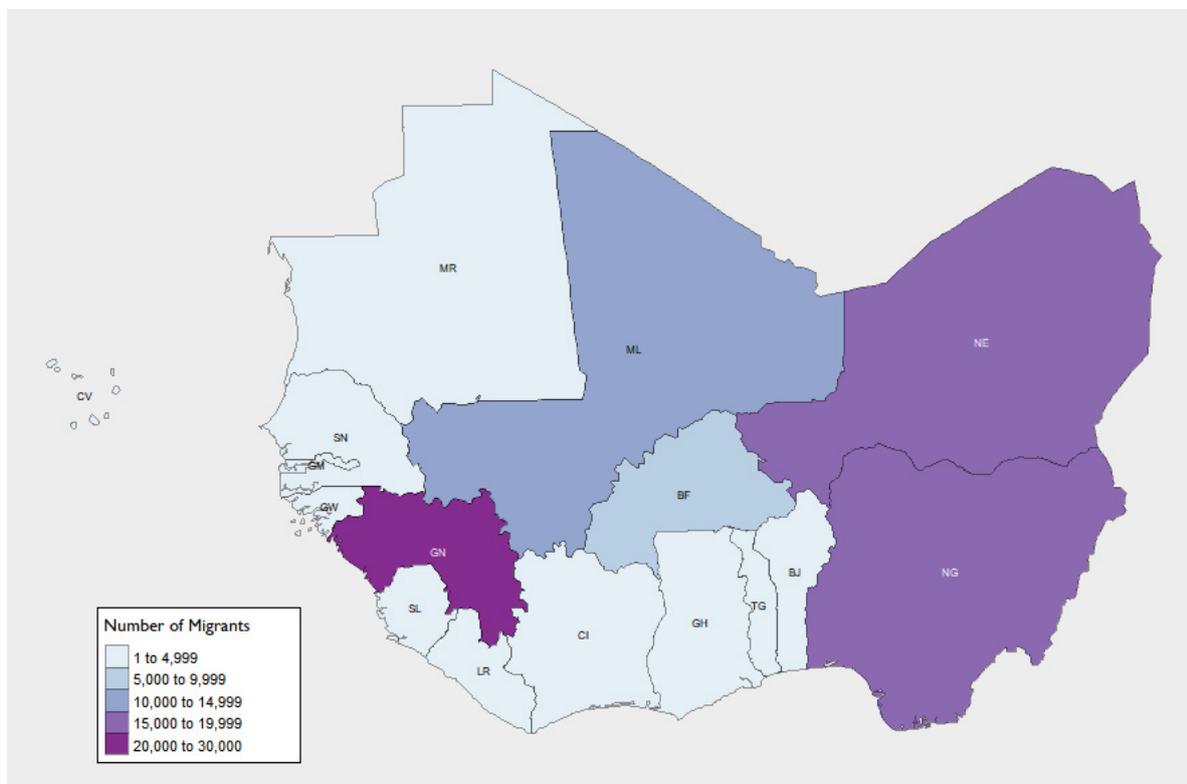
Like migrants all over the world, West and Central African migrants have diverse origins, backgrounds, ages, socioeconomic and educational profiles. Drawing on the current data set, this chapter provides a detailed examination of the profile of migrants moving within and out of the region, the modalities of their travel, their intended destinations, as well as the various elements driving their journeys.

### 3.1.1. MIGRANTS' DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

#### Nationality

Despite the significant diversity, the top eight countries of origin were the same in both years of the study: Guinea, Nigeria, the Niger, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire (Figures 5 and 6). Migrants from West African countries represented 92.13 per cent of all participants. It is worth mentioning that among respondents coming from Central African countries, 85 per cent were Chadians.

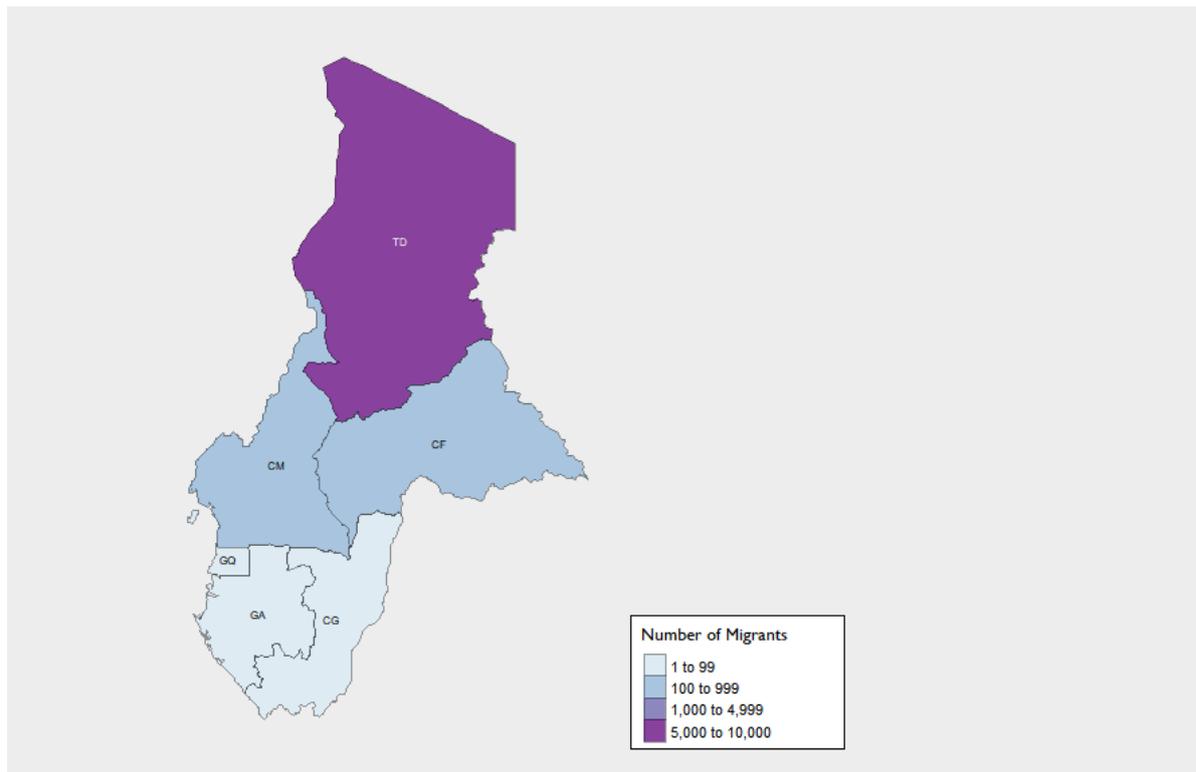
Figure 5. Choropleth map presenting the number of participants per country of origin (West Africa)



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration. Countries are labelled with their respective [ISO alpha-2 codes](#).

Figure 6. Choropleth map presenting the number of participants per country of origin (Central Africa)



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration. Countries are labelled with their respective ISO alpha-2 codes.

### Demographics

As previous research has established, and in line with the demography of the continent as a whole, migrants moving within the region generally tend to be young (OECD, 2019). The majority of the respondents (54.84%) were young adults (i.e. aged 24–35), while youth (14–23) formed the second largest group (25.33%) (Figure 7). Among youth, 1,257 interviewees (1.14% of the total population interviewed) were children between the ages of 14 and 17. The number of children passing through the FMPs in 2018 and 2019 showed little variation, suggesting a consistent and steady migration trend among children in the region. More than half of these children travelled alone, without any adult (familial or otherwise) company.

Further analysis revealed a statistically significant and surprising difference between children and adults: children were more likely to travel alone compared to migrants over the age of 18. Leaving a familiar and often protective environment, to embark on travel alone, places children in a highly risky situation, where their physical and psychological security and well-being can be threatened. According to a recent UNICEF study, at least 75 per cent of the 1,600 children aged 14–17 arriving in Italy from Africa reported experiencing violence and abuse while travelling alone (UNICEF, 2017; UNICEF and IOM, 2017).

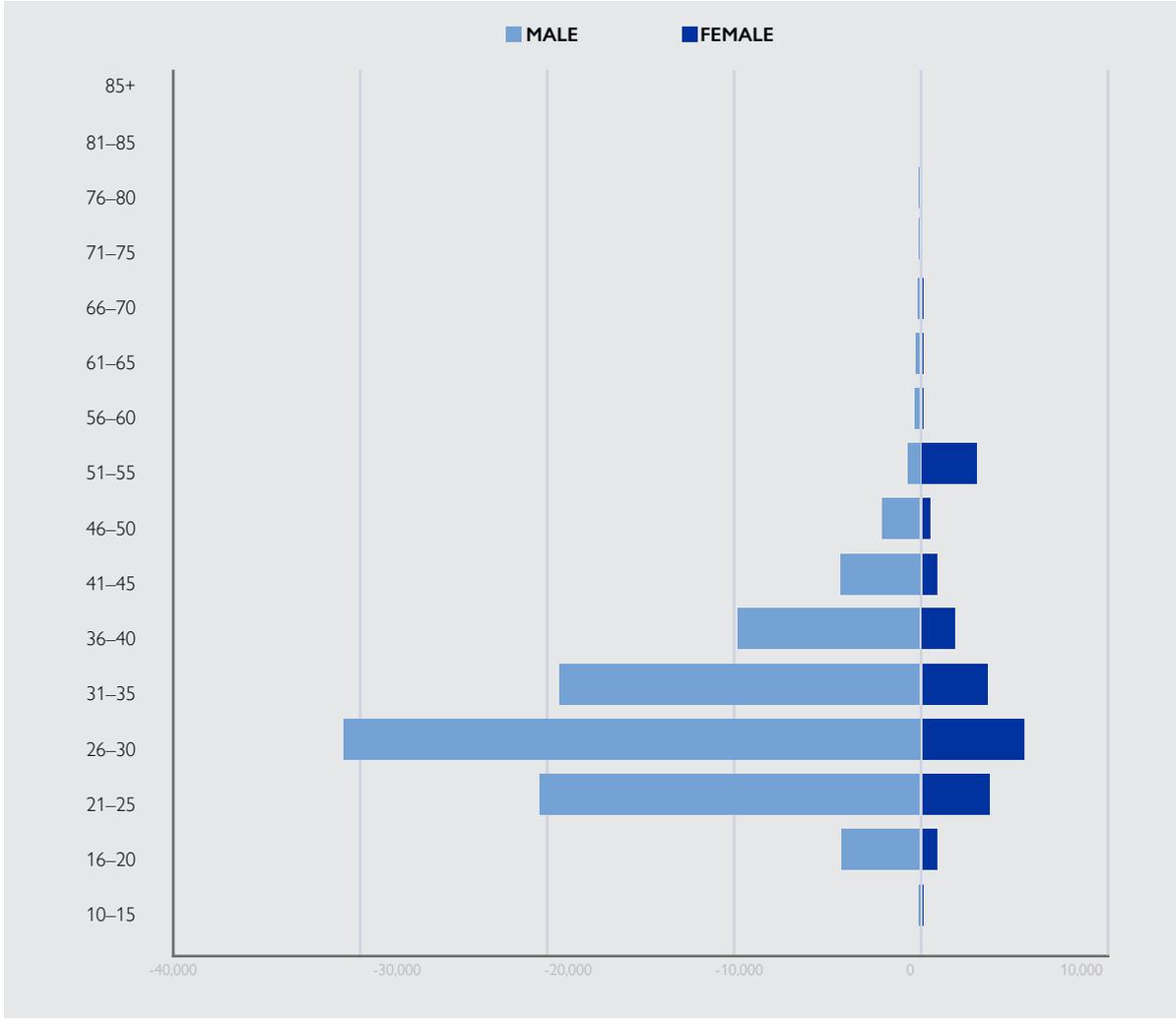
A small proportion (0.13%) of migrants interviewed reported being aged 65 or older, an indication that some older individuals may feel compelled to resort to migration. Research has shown that older migrants can be more likely to experience double jeopardy because of marginalization related to their age and status as migrants – a situation with potentially negative effects on the outcome of their journey (Torres and Lawrence, 2012).

During the survey period, Guineans made up the largest nationality group transiting through the FMPs. The proportion of youth within this group was second only to Gambians. Nigerians had the largest proportion of young adults, at 79.93 per cent of all Nigerians interviewed. Chadians and Guineans represented the largest number of children on the move (2.62% and 2.2%, respectively).

The majority (84.29%) of respondents identified as male. The 15.71 per cent (17,338) that identified as female represented a consistently present segment of migrants in the region. The number of migrant women in Africa has grown over the years – from 7.4 million in 1990 to 11.6 million in 2017 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2018).

Like their male counterparts, female respondents were mainly young adults (24–35), with a smaller but still significant number under 24 years. When focusing on children exclusively, data showed that during the study period, there was a difference between female and male child migration: 1.48 per cent of female respondents were children, in comparison to 1.08 per cent of male respondents.

Figure 7. Population pyramid of the study sample



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

## Group dynamics

More than half (53.62%) of the respondents reported travelling alone rather than in a group. Even though travelling without company is more common among male migrants, data showed that almost half of the female respondents (46.93%) were also travelling without a relative or family member. Discussing the movement of women in the region, one expert further explained:

*“It is very common for women who are single or widowed to become sole providers and migrate (alone) to make more money, get better opportunities – that is, the same as male migrants. [They are] sole breadwinners trying to improve conditions by going to seek better employment opportunities somewhere else.”*

Further analysis indicated that of those who reported to be travelling in a group, only 13.11 per cent were travelling with children. Like respondents travelling alone, gender differences were also apparent in this group, as only 4.47 per cent of male respondents travelling in a group chose to travel with children, in comparison to 8.64 per cent of female respondents.

### Text box 3. Migration of women and girls

Most female respondents originated from Guinea (4,786), followed by Nigeria, the Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. Among single female respondents, Nigerians were the dominant group: 73.12 per cent of the Nigerian women interviewed were single, of which 83.15 per cent were young adults (25–34), a finding that suggests that Nigerian women are overcoming cultural and social taboos (Ajala, 2016) that might discourage young, single women from migrating.

The largest number of female children and youth interviewed originated from Guinea, followed by Nigeria. Sierra Leone presents a notable case study: Although the number of Sierra Leonean female respondents was significantly small, almost half of them were under the age of 24 and 60.87 per cent of female youth were single at the time of migration. Most of these female respondents opted to travel in a group, with only 21.9 per cent of these young, single women reporting to be travelling alone.

Another notable case is Mali: 65.8 per cent of Malian female respondents reported being under the age of 24 and single, while 71.16 per cent reported to be travelling alone.

## Education

The relationship between educational attainment and propensity to migrate is complex and dynamic (Williams, 2009). Despite extensive research into the effects of education on migration, this relationship remains unclear, given the dynamic and constantly changing nature of migration. Some studies point to a strong positive effect (UNESCO, 2018), others indicate an opposite (i.e. negative) effect (e.g. Quinn and Rubb, 2005), and still others show no correlation at all (e.g. Curran and Rivero-Fuentes, 2003). Despite the fact that there is no strong agreement among scholars about the role that education plays in migration (Browne, 2017; UNESCO, 2018), most studies seem to agree on one point: that across low-income contexts, there is a positive correlation between educational attainment and the decision to migrate. More specifically, in these contexts, people with higher education are more likely to migrate, motivated by a desire for higher financial prospects or the lack of options in the country of origin (Browne, 2017; UNESCO, 2018). What remains unclear, however, is whether the desire to migrate leads to higher educational attainment (Browne, 2017) or whether having higher education inspires individuals to migrate.

Data from this study showed that only 20.97 per cent of respondents reported having no education at all, while 79.03 per cent reported having completed some level of education ranging from primary to tertiary and religious education. More than a third (36%) of the respondents had completed secondary education, followed by those who had completed primary education (23.1%). An important finding is that 10 per cent of respondents had completed tertiary education and/or received professional training, which means that 1 out of 10 respondents moving within the region is considered to be a highly skilled individual.

Respondents from West African countries tended to have higher levels of education than their Central African counterparts – a possible concern from a perspective of brain drain and human capital loss (IMF, 2016). One key informant commented on this apparent correlation:

*“If people feel like there is an opportunity, they will not leave. [...] Unless you create jobs, people will always move. If I stay at home doing nothing, I will die. If you look at the number of young people with university degrees doing nothing, it is staggering. [This is why they migrate.]”*

Interesting gender differences emerged from the data: While almost half the male respondents who reported having basic education<sup>8</sup> (42.68%) outnumbered their female counterparts (39.24%), more female than male respondents (8.59% and 5.94%, respectively) had completed tertiary education.

**Text box 4. Highly-skilled and low-skilled migration**

In this study, Chadians were the nationality with the highest percentage of low-skilled migrants with no formal education (37.61%), followed by Burkinabe (35.43%). At the other end of the spectrum, Nigerians had the highest percentage of highly skilled migrants who had completed tertiary education (10.73%), followed by Guineans (9.81%) and Sierra Leoneans (8.17%).

A strikingly high proportion of Nigerian respondents (72.49%) had completed secondary education, and 1 out of 10 Nigerians was highly skilled, having completed tertiary education. Only 3.24 per cent of Nigerian respondents reported having no education at all – the lowest percentage among all the nationalities interviewed. This positive correlation between educational achievement and migration highlights the current job opportunity challenges facing many young Nigerians in their country.

**3.1.2. MIGRO ERGO SUM: REASONS FOR MIGRATING**

As elsewhere, migration in the region is driven by a combination of diverse factors that span from individual and family reasons to community and societal forces (UNDP, 2019a). The dominant forces shaping individual migration may change during the journey, sometimes leading to modifications in the migration trajectory or the phasing of the movement. A holistic understanding of these drivers calls for an examination of both the direct factors affecting the decision to migrate and the ways in which these factors interact with and are influenced by other relevant elements, which include traditions, cultural beliefs, and societal and familial structures (Hashim and Thorsen, 2012), as well as regional and continental politics.

This study explored six interacting migration drivers that impinge on the decision-making of the West and Central African migrants interviewed: (a) income generation-related reasons, (b) natural disasters, (c) war or conflict, (d) targeted persecution, (e) access to services and (f) family reasons.

**Income generation-related reasons**

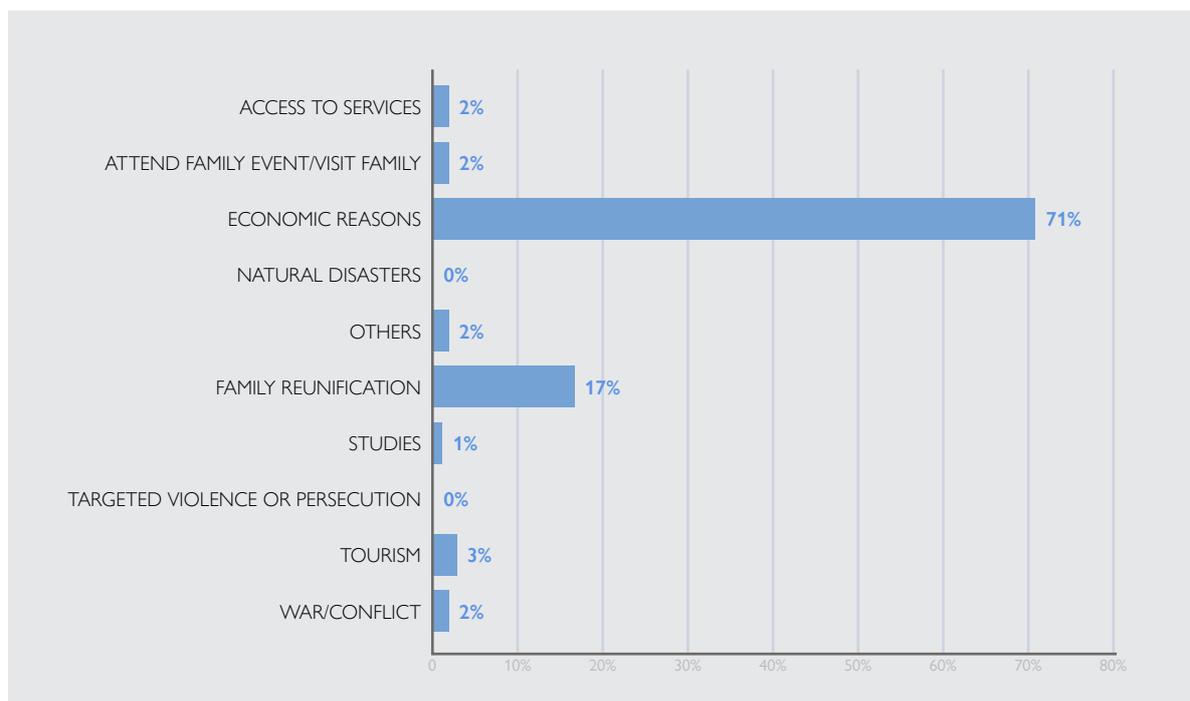
8 Basic education includes primary and lower secondary education.

Labour migration is a dominant feature of West and Central African migration, with 79.6 per cent of respondents reporting the need for income generation opportunities as an important driver (Figure 8). Within the region there are, however, differences: West African migrants are far more likely to migrate for income generation (80.72%) than for political or environmental reasons compared to Central African migrants (66.49%).

Clearly, labour migration is, in part, a response to social distress and financial need: 86.82 per cent of respondents seeking income generation opportunities originate from countries with high youth unemployment (Nigeria and Guinea) or high multidimensional poverty (the Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad). In fact, Guinea and Nigeria, the top two migrant labour-sending countries, are among the most multidimensionally poor countries in the region, unable to provide adequate educational opportunities, health services and living standards (United Nations Development Fund (UNDF), 2019). According to the data, respondents with basic skills and basic and higher education were more likely than those without such training to accept the risks posed by migration to seek economic opportunities elsewhere.

Furthermore, in the context of widespread poverty and limited job opportunities, labour migration had become a viable option particularly for young respondents: 81.54 per cent of youth respondents, the majority identifying as male, reported migrating for economic reasons. Respondents under the age of 34 were more likely to migrate for economic reasons than older adults. Child migrant respondents were also overwhelmingly driven by economic reasons, with 71.28 per cent reporting it as a driver.

Figure 8. Reasons for migration (child participants)



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

In terms of gender, the literature suggests that men and women tend to migrate for similar reasons (United Nations, 2019). Although male respondents were more likely to migrate in search of income generation opportunities than women, over half of the female respondents (58.21%) reported migrating primarily for economic reasons. As one key informant explained:

*“In general, migration drivers are similar for men and women [...], but there are specific pressures that differ from one locality to another. We have noticed pressure on women from the family and community to migrate alone and become breadwinners. [...] They might know they will end up in sexually exploitative situations, but they still see it [migrating] as an opportunity. There are trafficking/smuggling networks that particularly target women in many countries, [but they still try to migrate].”*

Another key informant elaborated:

*“It seems like a historical trend: Women are somehow breadwinners and have to provide for their families – they [feel] like it is an obligation for them to find a way to take care of their families. This area is affected in terms of development – not many jobs, [and] farming is not very developed there. They feel like [there is] an obligation to travel and maybe change their situation in turn.”*

Although gender clearly plays a key role in determining migration modalities, the data analysed in this study does not provide sufficient context for fully exploring the gendered dimensions of West and Central Africa migration, a topic that clearly requires additional study.

Apart from income generation opportunities, other desiderata form part of the aspiration to improve living conditions: 2.15 per cent of respondents reported seeking better services, such as medical care and access to food. As a key informant explained:

*“There are a few very interesting cases either of women with children or men who travel to Burkina Faso to access traditional healing methods [...] These people had mental or physical health conditions and did not want to be treated in regular hospitals, but instead through traditional healing methods. This is an interesting phenomenon in Burkina [Faso], but [...] we don’t have enough evidence to say that this is a big trend. Many people also believe that in Mali, Quranic schools are better, so people travel from Burkina [Faso], to Mali to attend these schools.”*

### **Cultural norms and peer pressure as factors behind labour migration**

Societal norms and expectations influence migration decisions just as strictly employment-related considerations do. Social constructions of gender also play a role in determining who migrate, and how and when they do this (Ajala, 2016). In many countries in the region, women are seen as naturally unequal to men, a perception that positions men first in the scheme of things. Thus, men dominate the economic and political sphere, while women lack any political or economic empowerment. This gender discrimination tends to be one of the main reasons behind the unequal distribution of wealth between the two genders, thus increasing the prevalence of female poverty (Ajala, 2016).

## Text box 5. Migration trends: Migrant women seeking income-generating opportunities

Nigeria and Guinea are the two countries that generated the largest numbers of migrant women seeking income-generating opportunities: 32.47 per cent of female respondents who reported migrating for economic reasons originated from Nigeria and 23.20 per cent from Guinea.

**Migrant girls**

A considerable proportion (41.41%) of the study's female child population reported migrating for economic reasons. Although the mobility of girls in the region is not always socially accepted, familial and societal reactions vary depending on the specific context (Save the Children and MMC, 2018; Ajala, 2016). In the Niger, for example, female child migration is socially punishable within specific communities, thus leading to girls' ostracism in those communities (Save the Children and MMC, 2018). By contrast, it is socially acceptable for girls from Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal to embark on labour migration; indeed, being a labour migrant can be a factor for ensuring a good marriage. According to a recent study, labour migration of Burkinabe girls allows them to become autonomous, a characteristic that tends to be appreciated by prospective husbands (Save the Children and MMC, 2018). In places overwhelmed by extreme poverty, child mobility becomes an important income source for families. Although migration to support the family is largely considered an obligation of boys, girls also undertake such migration journeys (Save the Children and MMC, 2018). As a key informant noted:

*"Talking about child migration in our region [...] In 2019, more than two thirds of migrant children migrated for economic reasons. Many of them were actually motivated by working in the gold mines in Chad. But migrant girls also migrate for economic reasons. [They migrate] more for business – many girls sell dates in the north of Chad."*

In many West and Central African countries, embarking on migration has replaced traditional male rites of passage into adulthood. As a key informant noted:

*"It is very common and normal for young men to leave and try their chances in Europe, [...] [The pressure is such] that you almost have to go and migrate and try your luck."*

Glowing, but often idealized, narratives from migrant peers, disseminated through social media, compound the social pressure to embark upon a migration journey. A key informant elaborated:

*"The impact of social media [and peer's success] is massive – everyone wants to be that person. What makes it scary [is that] when you present statistics on how many people make it, even if 99 out of 100 people die, they still think they can make it to Europe [like the rest]. [...] Once you are of the age to make something of your life, it is time to move on."*

Given the social (including peer), cultural and economic pressures, migration can easily become the only survival option that young West and Central Africans consider to be within their grasp. As IOM Niger's Chief of Mission wrote in 2016: "The philosophical proposition *cogito ergo sum* by Descartes in our modern times turns into a new *migro ergo sum*. Families, entire communities, peers – the pressure comes from all angles, and young Africans cannot resist, they have to migrate if they want to 'be.'" (Loprete, 2016)

## Family reasons

Family-related factors, ranging from the desire to reunite with already-migrated family members (the most common family reason) to attending family events, were identified the reason for migrating by 13,99 per cent of the respondents. This category of reasons was articulated by female respondents more often than by males; among children, family reasons (as a whole) were the second most reported mobility driver after the search for economic opportunities. As a key informant explained:

*“The younger they are, the more drivers such as family being in a destination country encourage them to migrate.”*

## Forcibly displaced people

According to IOM, forced migration, also known as forced displacement, is defined as “a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion or coercion”. This term is used widely to describe the movement of refugees, internally displaced people, individuals displaced by disasters or development projects, and, in some cases, victims of human trafficking (IOM, 2019a).

A total of 8,168 respondents reported having been forcibly displaced in their own countries prior to their migration journeys. The majority attributed their migration journeys to conflict (60.82%).<sup>9</sup> The next most common reasons given for displacement were targeted violence (23.96%) and natural disasters (32.84%). The respondents that identified as forcibly displaced migrants originated mostly from Guinea, Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Chad. Many of these respondents reported the need for access to services, educational opportunities and economic opportunities as an additional factor for fleeing. Describing the situation in the region and how it affects people, a key informant noted:

*“There is a major issue of forced displacement [in the region] due to violence in the Lake Chad region and due to conflicts in Sudan, as well as problems in the north (of Chad). [As a result,] important gold mining areas have recently been restricted. Because of extremist groups in Lake Chad, due to violence and insecurity, many commercial fishermen who rely on the lake for livelihood migrate to other fishing points, [...] they are migrating to Central and East and Southern Chad. The phenomenon is very multidimensional.”*

Central African respondents were less likely than West Africans to have been forcibly displaced in their own countries prior to their journey: 9.44 per cent of the Central African respondents reported forced displacement due to violence or disaster, in comparison to 11.44 per cent of their West African counterparts.

Interestingly, and by contrast, a very small percentage of participants from Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso reported being forcibly displaced in their own countries, despite ongoing conflicts and religious attacks in the area. This may be explained by the fact that forced displacement in West and Central Africa is often highly localized (most displaced persons find refuge in neighbouring localities or regions), and forcibly displaced persons are more likely to remain within the borders of their country of origin rather than flee to third countries. In addition, IOM FMPs are not located in areas of significant forced displacement and may, thus, not capture forced displacement flows.

In terms of destination, 87.75 per cent of those who had been forcibly displaced in their countries prior to their journeys said that they intended to remain on the continent; only 11.73 per cent identified

.....  
<sup>9</sup> Individuals reporting 73 nationalities were included in this study. For this specific analysis, only those respondents with a West or Central African nationality were included.

Europe as their intended destination, and less than 1 per cent planned to migrate to other continents. Forcibly displaced participants were less likely to embark upon long-distance journeys and were more likely to remain close to their home countries than their non-forcibly displaced counterparts – evidence that suggested a desire to return home as soon as conditions allowed it (Figures 9a and 9b). Indeed, 26.52 per cent of these interviewees reported their country of departure as their destination country, actively indicating their intention to return.

A closer look at the top three nationalities of forcibly displaced respondents confirms this conclusion: Guineans migrated mostly to Senegal, the Gambia or Mauritania, and a significant number returned home. Most Malians tended to return home, with a significant number migrating to Algeria or Mauritania, while migrants from the Niger preferred to move to Nigeria or Libya.

Figure 9a. Intended final destination reported by forcibly displaced migrants, by nationality (West African)

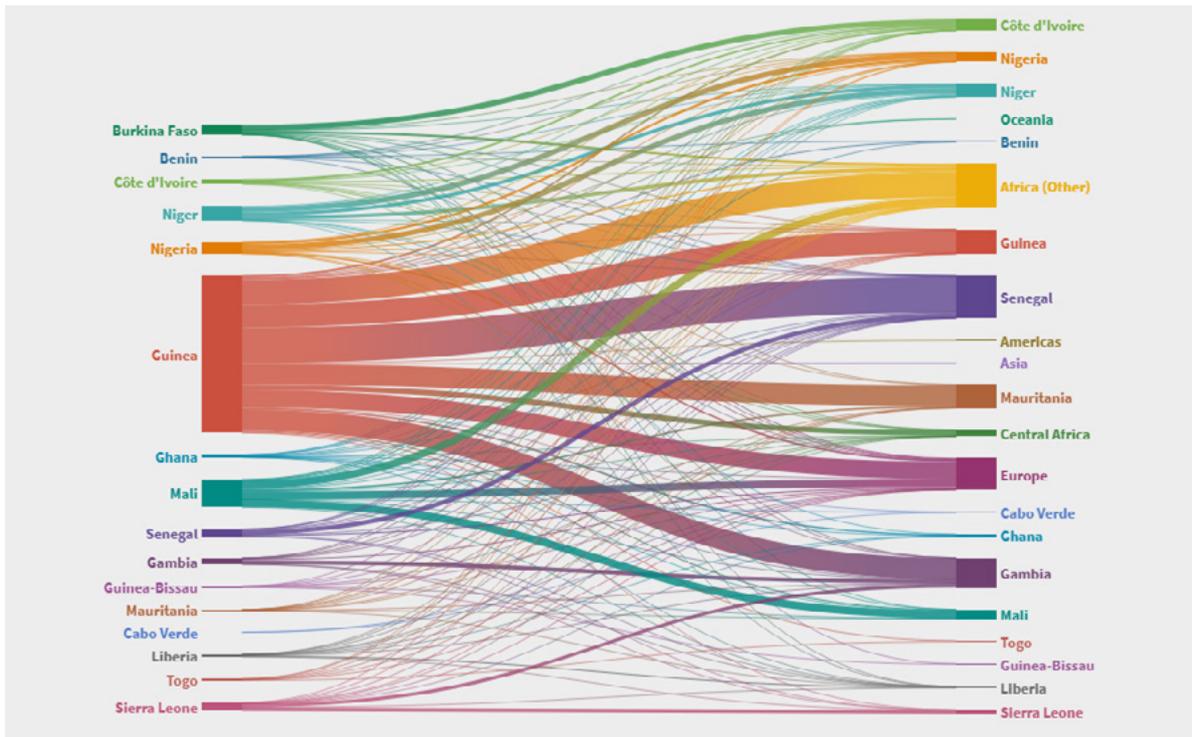
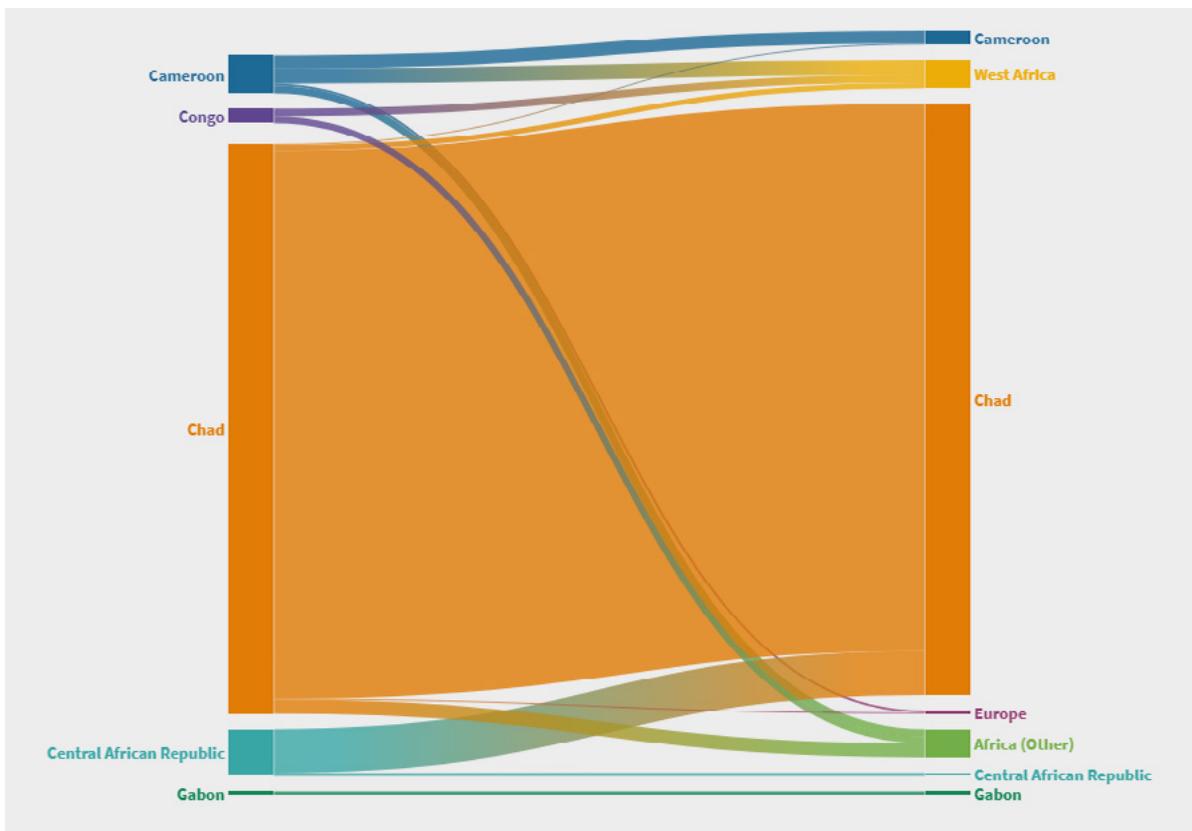


Figure 9b. Intended final destination reported by forcibly displaced migrants, by nationality (Central Africa)



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

### Text box 6. Children under the microscope: Forced displacement

Less than a quarter (23.36%) of the 839 child respondents in the sample reported being forcibly displaced in their country. However, stratifying by nationality highlights a difference: Only 1.59 per cent of Central African children, compared to 31.72 per cent of West African children, reported being forcibly displaced in their own country.

While both regions display a statistically significant difference between children's and adults' likelihood for forced displacement, the directionality of this relationship differs across the regions. The high proportion of West African children reporting forced displacement relative to Central African children is attributable mainly to migrants from Guinea, among whom 73.97 per cent of children reported forced displacement, compared to 26.03 per cent of adults. There is also a significant difference across genders – specifically, 74.36 per cent of male children from Guinea reported being forcibly displaced, compared to 32 per cent of male adults. While the difference is not nearly as drastic among their female counterparts, the rate is extremely high (69.52% of adult females and 72.34% of female children). For both genders, there is a statistically significant association of children reporting higher rates of displacement compared to adults.

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## Text box 7. Chad as a case study

Chadians were the only respondents who overwhelmingly identified war and conflict as the main driver of their mobility. Chad is characterized by low socioeconomic development indicators, low levels of education, high levels of poverty and low levels of national integration. Since 2014, the country has been the epicentre of a complex humanitarian crisis with multiple causes, including violence and deadly attacks by non-State armed groups operating in the broader Lake Chad Basin, a situation that has displaced millions (IOM, 2019c). Despite their forced displacement, 94.49 per cent of Chadians reported Chad as their intended final destination. Only 0.26 per cent identified a European destination, while the remainder reported intentions to stay in Africa.

Figure 10. Political map of Chad



Source: Prepared by the IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa based on Google Maps, February 2021.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

## 3.2. FINANCING THE JOURNEY

Data on the financial resources migrants use before and during their journey are anecdotal and scattered. This complicates the task of developing a holistic understanding of how a journey, particularly an irregular one, is financed.

Two thirds (66.76%) of respondents reported using their savings to finance their journey. As a key informant explained:

*“[The] main source (of funding) is savings accumulated prior to migration. Migration is a project that is prepared [for] and these migrants are planning ahead. [Personal] savings account for 75 per cent of funding sources.”*

Prospective migrants often liquidate personal assets to secure funds, a strategy that can severely complicate return or future migration planning. As another key informant elaborated:

*“Many people sell all that they have to migrate and people do not have anything when they come back.”*

For a significant percentage, migration required familial assistance: 21.91 per cent of respondents received support from their social networks at home, while 7.61 per cent reported receiving economic contributions from their networks abroad. As previously discussed, social networks can become either a protective factor or a risk factor for a migrant depending on the ties the migrant has with the network that he or she seeks help from, as well as the network’s expectations of the migrant. Unpaid loans owed to community or family members generate negative reactions, turning the family or community into a risk rather than a protective factor for the migrant, thus increasing their vulnerability to danger and harm or complicating the process of reintegration back home. As a key informant noted:

*“Migrants are not financing their journey alone, the huge majority are benefiting from family or community to start the migration process, to take the road. [But this carries a responsibility.] If you go on the adventure and come back empty-handed you can be [socially] excluded [in] the country of origin.”*

Less than a fifth (18.3%) of respondents declined to answer the question about journey financing. A possible explanation might be that not all respondents feel at ease disclosing this kind of information. It could also be that others had been forced into irregular activities or had had to rely on questionable, debt-financed migration options (see, e.g.: UNODC, 2011; Djajić, 2014) that they did not wish to discuss. The reluctance to disclose questionable sources of financing complicates the task of monitoring exploitative processes and instituting preventative strategies. As a key informant explained:

*“The worst part about these debt scenarios is that there is no real evidence of these happening, [and there] could be issues of overstating or understating the amounts [and loan conditions].”*

Many key informants further commented on how the lack of available resources, compounded by parents' opposition to their children's decision to migrate, could lead migrant children to steal from family resources, causing tension among family members and, again, complicating the decision to return. According to one key informant:

*“Some of them steal money from their family. This can be an issue when they come back – there can be issues, but this is a minority of cases.”*

According to another key informant:

*“Theft, we don’t see much [but it exists]. The pressure is high among children who need to prove [to their parents] that their decision [to migrate and steal money to do it] was right.”*

From a gendered perspective, support from social networks abroad seemed to be especially important in the case of young women, particularly those travelling to Europe. The majority of those who travel autonomously, however, fund their journeys through their own savings.

### 3.3. MIGRATION TRENDS, ROUTES AND TRAJECTORIES

**Listening to key informants' voices**

*“This is a very typical view that media tends to focus on, but the data actually shows that the percentage of travelers who plan to go to Europe is very small. Most migration in West and Central Africa stays within the region. It’s possible that they have long-term plans to go to Europe, but [most of them] want to stay within the region. [...] Of course, there are boats with people dying in the Mediterranean Sea – this is a big deal in the media – but the figures and facts show that African migrants, in general, remain within Africa.*

– Key informant

Although this study succeeded in collecting data from 110,402 respondents representing 73 different nationalities, for 7.56 per cent of the survey respondents (8,341 individuals), nationality was either not recorded or coded as “missing” if the respondent’s stated address did not correspond to an identifiable place of origin. With regard to sections of this report that pertain to the experiences of West and Central African migrants, only respondents who reported a West African or Central African nationality were included in the analysis, and nationalities were categorized into regions as per their respective ISO codes and United Nations subregions, to only include West and Central African nationalities regions in the analysis.<sup>10</sup>

Discussions around migration within West and Central Africa and across the Mediterranean are often partial representations of a complex reality. Data from this study shows that the bulk of respondents with a West or Central African nationality moving within the region intend to remain on the continent and even within the region; indeed, the majority tend to restrict their mobility within their region of

10 Nationals of countries outside West and Central Africa comprised approximately 1 per cent of the data set. Other than for the purposes of statistical fidelity, restricting the data to West and Central African migrants, as defined by the current study, for these specific discussions allowed for a better understanding of the migration patterns of individuals originating from the same region with similar legal rights.

origin. A large majority (80.09%) of these respondents reported a West or Central African country as their final destination, and only 19.37 per cent reported Europe as their final destination. Less than 0.5 per cent reported the Americas, Asia or Oceania as their intended destination.<sup>11</sup> More West African respondents engaged in extracontinental migration and they were also more likely to travel longer distances than Central African respondents: 97.33 per cent of Central African respondents stated an African country as their intended destination.

### 3.3.1. INTRACONTINENTAL AFRICAN MIGRATION

Based on the West and Central African respondents' answers, intracontinental flows presented strong regional variations: 22.82 per cent of the total number of West African respondents chose the Niger as their final destination, 16.90 per cent chose Algeria, and 8.06 per cent chose Mali. Smaller numbers of respondents reported Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. On the other hand, the vast majority of Central African respondents (71.15%) identified Chad as their final destination, with a smaller percentage (12.37%) stating Libya. Although a destination within the region is the main choice for most West and Central African respondents, when it comes to age differences, data showed that young people were more likely to choose a destination outside the continent than their older counterparts.

#### Text box 8. Children under the microscope: Destination countries

Guinea was a popular destination for 20.05 per cent (223) of West and Central African child respondents. Mauritania and Senegal followed, chosen by 11.24 per cent (125) and 10.25 per cent (114), respectively, of child respondents. Other popular destination countries for children on the move were Chad, Mali and Algeria.

Focusing on a regional and gendered perspective, data revealed a difference between West African male and female respondents, with migrant women more likely to remain within Africa and avoid long distances compared to migrant men, who had a higher likelihood than women of migrating to Europe (and other countries) Women were more likely to stay within Africa, with the three most frequently reported final destinations being the Niger (12.11%), Nigeria (10.28%) and Mali (8.38%). No such significant difference was detected among Central African respondents.

Intracontinental migration seems to be a strategy for the vast majority of West and Central African respondents who reported being forcibly displaced in their country, with 98 per cent of those fleeing war, 97.66 per cent of those fleeing violence, and 99.36 per cent of those escaping from natural disasters opting to stay on the continent. African countries were also chosen by 94.33 per cent of those migrating who were seeking services, 97.84 per cent of those migrating for educational reasons and 98.52 per cent of those migrating to rejoin their families.

<sup>11</sup> Individuals reporting a total of 73 nationalities were included in this study. For this specific analysis, for contextual reasons, only those respondents with a West or Central African nationality were included.

### Text box 9. The Niger: A major destination country for intracontinental flows

The choice of the Niger as the primary final destination for 13,621 (16.8%) of respondents, is intriguing. The Niger is a developing country that ranks almost at the bottom of the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2019b). The country faces significant development challenges, including inefficient agriculture, lack of infrastructure, poor health care and environmental degradation. All these factors complicate the task of securing sustainable livelihoods for citizens and migrants alike.

However, given its vicinity to poor and landlocked countries, the Niger is the only option for migrants who do not have the capacity to move long distances. As the country offers visa-free entry to citizens of a long list of its West African neighbours (Samuel Hall, 2016), it is a more convenient destination for those who do not wish to travel irregularly. Further, the Niger's large and quite informal mining sector provides significant income-generating opportunities for migrants despite the risks associated with this type of work.

Additionally, the Niger's geographic position on the route to Libya, as well as the country's long-standing smuggling networks (Samuel Hall, 2016), make the country an obvious transit point for migrants. Although this study did not gather data on this point, it can be assumed that some of the respondents chose the Niger to take advantage of these networks and migrate irregularly. IOM estimates that more than 70,000 migrants used the country as a transit point in 2017 (IOM, 2017c).

### 3.3.2. EXTRACONTINENTAL AFRICAN MIGRATION

African migration to Europe is diversified, with migrants opting for a wide range of European countries as their chosen destinations. Among the study's West and Central African respondents, 41.65 per cent identified Italy; 32.72 per cent, Spain; and 11.30 per cent, France, as their chosen final destination, while smaller numbers pointed to Germany, the United Kingdom, Portugal, the Netherlands and Greece. An analysis of extracontinental flows by region of origin revealed that 2.63 per cent of Central Africans were travelling towards Europe, compared to 21.09 per cent of West African respondents.

As with intracontinental migration, gendered variations emerged from an analysis of extracontinental flows from West Africa. This was not the case for flows from Central Africa. Young males from West Africa were more likely than females to travel to Europe. As one key informant working in the region explained, the risk associated with the journey to Europe is one of the reasons that dissuade migrant women from embarking on extracontinental migration:

*“The ambition of reaching Europe is highest among [unaccompanied] migrant children and particularly [high] among young men – it is understood as a very difficult journey. [...] Women who travel alone may perceive migrating to Europe [as being] too risky or they think that they can make enough money [if they stay within Africa, like] in Algeria.”*

The main driver reported for extracontinental migration was the need for economic opportunities. However, 79.60 per cent of West and Central African respondents reporting economic reasons as their migration drivers chose to stay within the region – evidence that should reframe the skewed discussion on migration from West and Central Africa across the Mediterranean Sea.

**Text box 10. The journey to Europe**

Within the sample, Nigerians constituted the largest number of respondents intending to reach Europe. Almost one in three Nigerians reported Europe as their chosen destination, with most of aiming to go to Italy and a smaller percentage opting for France, Spain and Germany.

**3.3.3. MULTIPLE MIGRATION ATTEMPTS, RETURN HOME AND SEASONAL MIGRATION**

Migration theories that frame movement as a linear and direct process from the origin to the destination country misrepresent much human mobility by ignoring or underestimating the role that obstacles, difficulties or opportunities play in interrupting the journey as originally intended (Townsend and Oomen, 2015). Individual migrant characteristics, social networks (Gladkova and Mazzucatto, 2015), information about migration options and the initial mobility driver also influence the course of the journey. Journeys may be circular, multidirectional or iterative, with long or short phases in transit (IOM, 2016). Migrants may return home and attempt to migrate again in the future should the conditions allow it (“remigration”), or they may embark on another journey towards a different destination if, after reaching their intended destination, they find that it does not fulfil their expectations (“secondary migration”).

**Multiple migration attempts**

Previous data on migration trends have shown that population movements tend to be phased, with migrants changing destinations more than once (Wagner et al., 2019; UNHCR, 2019; Takenaka, 2007). Based on the data, 15.3 per cent of the West and Central African migrant population interviewed reported that they had already attempted to migrate and settle in a foreign country. Of the countries producing high numbers of migrants, Sierra Leone was the country with the highest percentage of respondents who reported making previous migration attempts (23.83%), followed by Burkina Faso (19.22%) and Nigeria (18.95%). The vast majority (82.51%) of West and Central African migrants who had already attempted to migrate made intraregional moves, with only 16.8 per cent choosing Europe as their destination.

Income generation-related motivations were the most common driver reported by these migrants (66.95%). A smaller but significant percentage identified family reunification (28.08%) or the desire to escape violence (2.36%). The survey tool did not further explore the migration histories of these respondents. During the interviews, however, key informants highlighted the correlation between an interrupted or unfulfilled migration cycle and migrants’ desire to attempt to migrate again – evidence of the determination to seek better life options. A key informant, who was specifically discussing remigration, noted:

*“Never underestimate the willpower of a person’s stated aims in life. [...] They will try as many times until they make it. Many people retry to migrate. They say to us: “As soon as I get home, I am going to get ready to go again.” People are extremely determined.”*

The determination seems to be higher when remigration is employed as a coping strategy against over-indebtedness caused by a previous migration attempt. In this case, remigration leads to a vicious cycle of overborrowing, usually from informal lenders. These new debts increase the pressure migrants feel to succeed. As a key informant highlighted:

*“There is often a second wave of borrowing. [People employ] any means possible: form a cooperative with friends, [borrow from] loan sharks. People will do anything to earn money to go again. There is always the process of “I know that I can make it this time; give me the money, and I will pay you back”.”*

Exploring the destination countries opted for by migrants who had already attempted to migrate, data shows that their movement patterns vary by region: West African participants tended to move within the same region, with a small percentage migrating to Libya, Spain and Italy, while Central African respondents preferred Chad, Libya and Côte d’Ivoire as their destinations.

Most migrants who had already attempted to migrate (56.11%) were aged from 25 to 34, but a significant number of youth (18.89%) also reported a previous migration attempt. Over 50 per cent of this youth group reported travelling alone – a factor that, when combined with their young age and likely indebtedness from previous migrations, may significantly increase their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.

#### Text box 11. Women on the move

According to the data, Nigeria is the leading sending country for migrant women who have already attempted to migrate, followed by Guinea. Women and girls from these countries are more likely to have a migration history, either of remigration or secondary migration, than their male counterparts. Both countries do not provide sustainable reintegration opportunities for returnees, regardless of the manner in which they return – voluntarily or forced. Many confront the same challenges that forced them to migrate in the first place, compounded by social rejection and family shame, thus increasing the chances of these returnees remigrating (see, e.g.: Digidiki and Bhabha, 2019a).

Despite the natural resource wealth of both countries, Guinea and Nigeria remain some of the poorest countries in the world. Half of the population of Guinea live below the poverty line, with almost 20 per cent in extreme poverty (McBride, 2017). In 2019, Nigeria, with more than 87 million of its population living on less than USD 2 a day, became the country with the largest number of people in poverty, overtaking India (Onu et al., 2019).

Both Guinea and Nigeria have high rates of unemployment and earning a living is a challenge. Women are most affected, faced with limited economic opportunities and poor rates of pay, challenges that are compounded by their high levels of illiteracy and maternal mortality.

Nigerian families tend to rely on young family members to send remittances after migrating; daughters are considered to be more reliable and loyal and more willing to support the family financially than males (van Dijk, 2001). For both Nigerian and Guinean women, geographic mobility is a means to achieve social mobility and raise personal and family living standards (Ratia and Notermans, 2011). This perspective motivates such repeat migration attempts.

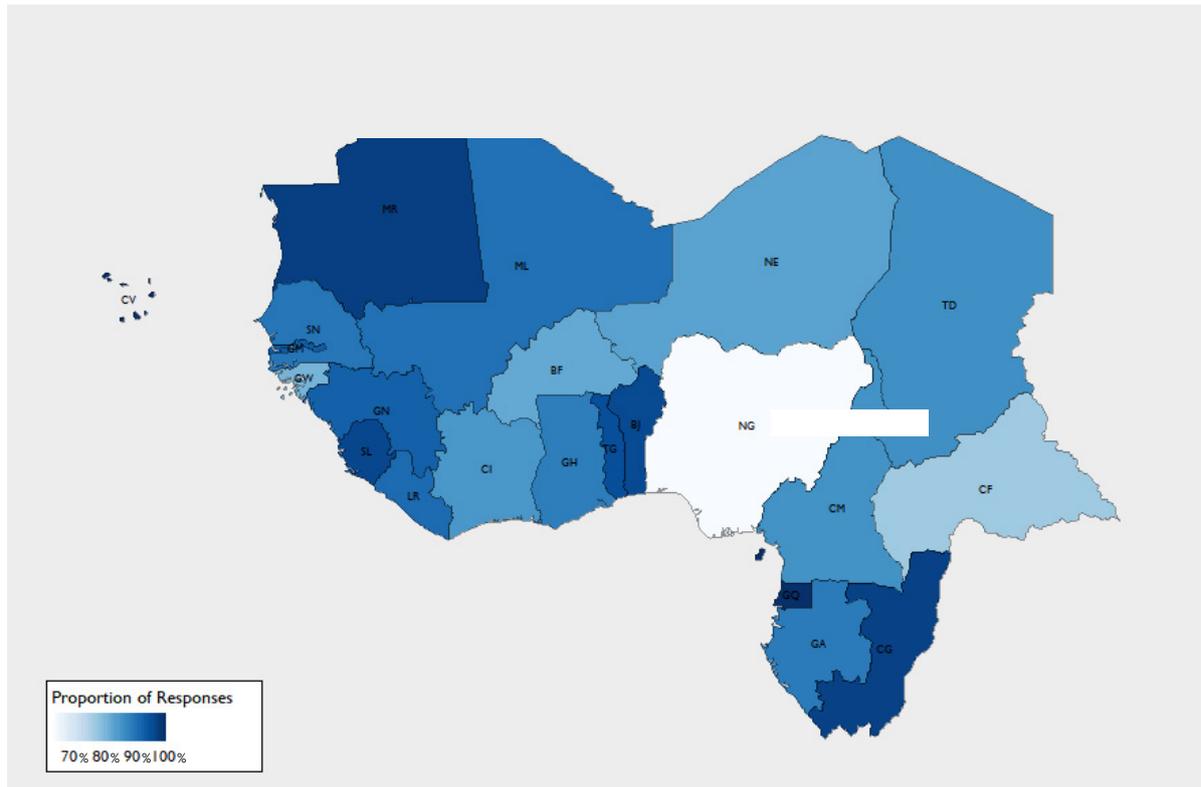
#### Return home

A large majority (86.21%) of the West and Central African respondents confirmed their desire to return home at some point in the future after the completion of their migration journeys, while

37.46 per cent reported their countries of departure to be their intended final destination, indicating that they were actively on their way to returning home (Figure 11).

Sierra Leone nationals comprised the largest group of respondents intending to return, followed by nationals from the Gambia, Guinea, Mali and Senegal (barring other nationalities with smaller counts). Nigeria was the country with the largest number of participants who did not wish to return. Data revealed no differences between Central and West African respondents, thus the intention to return should be attributed to country-level rather than regional-level factors.

Figure 11. Choropleth map presenting the proportion of the sample reporting a desire to return



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration. Countries are labelled with their respective ISO alpha-2 codes.

The profile of returnees is varied: Many returned after completing their migration cycles, others after forced interruptions. Discussing the profile of returnees, two key informants noted that returns are associated with both failed and successful migration attempts:

*“Most of the returnees are disappointed because they did not know the situation [they would face during migration]. They want to start afresh back in their home country. There are a lot of people who do not want to come back [...]. We have not seen a single person who has been successful in another country who came back.”*

Another key informant added:

*“Europe is seen as Heaven [and can be one] – if you get a job and make money. Many of these migrants, 98 per cent, [who make money] plan to come back to their home country after living in Europe.”*

The data did not reveal significant gender differences in the returnee group: 87.17 per cent of female and 86.08 per cent of male respondents expressed a desire to return home. However, there was a significant difference between age groups, with respondents aged 25–34 less likely to return. This survey did not capture enough rich data to provide an explanation for this difference. Young people (i.e. those aged 14–24), who wished to return were more likely to be male, while young adults who wished to return tended to be female.

Female respondents wishing to return tended to travel alone – a migration trend uncommon among men, who, on the contrary, were more likely to return if they were travelling in a group. This is an important finding for reintegration policies. If migrant women are constructed as “dependent” (Liacer et al., 2007; Caritas Internationalis, 2012), reintegration policies may fail to incorporate gender appropriately and effectively, given that women tend to both migrate and return autonomously, often alone.

Returning home seems to be particularly popular among West and Central African respondents who migrated for economic reasons: 78.14 per cent of those intending to return home had migrated voluntarily seeking economic opportunities. Given this motivation, as well as the continued dearth of income-generating and educational opportunities back home, the accumulated migration-related debts and related community ostracism, the prospects for sustainable reintegration seem slim. As a key informant explained:

*“You can be considered a failure – [so] there is a need to replenish. If you migrate and fail, you do not want to come back. Sometimes families reject returnees, [who are] perceived as not being able to pay back. You are considered a burden and an outcast – because you cannot pay the money back. It is extremely difficult. [The] implications are extremely negative.”*

A successful return is defined not just by a successful return home, but instead by effective familial and societal reintegration that enables a sustainable livelihood (Digidiki and Bhabha, 2019b; IOM 2019c). Governmental and non-governmental support plays an important role in providing returnees with viable livelihood opportunities. However, family support is also critical for returnees – to strengthen family ties and combat feelings of shame, failure and anxiety, and to renew a deep sense of belonging with returning family members.

As a key informant further noted:

*“Their reintegration scenarios are affected based on how they actually managed to raise funds for their migration experience. Those who don’t have loans [to pay back] are likely to [feel] relieved. There is a conception that they have “failed” the family if they cannot pay back the loan. It is more difficult to reintegrate them if they rely exclusively on IOM for support.”*

More than half (59.37%) of all respondents surveyed intended to return if and when conditions allowed, although the survey did not probe into what such conditions might be. Less than 6 per cent of all the respondents travelling to Europe said they would return to their home country regardless of the conditions, in contrast to 32.31 per cent of those respondents who had chosen an African country as their final destination. The data does not clarify the complexities of the return decision, the main reasons that prevent an immediate return, and the impact of migrants’ return at the individual, familial and community levels. Further evidence is needed to inform measures that would enable safe return and sustainable reintegration, particularly for returnees whose journeys were unsuccessful.

## Seasonal migration

Seasonal labour mobility is a significant and common livelihood strategy. It has been defined as a form of temporary migration driven by the economic activity of a person who does not change his or her usual place of residence (Bilsborrow et al., 1984). This temporary migration trend is observed mostly in rural areas subject to increased agricultural distress, including in countries or regions where there is an internal shift of labour from agriculture to other sectors. Seasonal migration can also be a transitional step taken before the decision to embark upon longer-term migration, leading to a permanent change of residence (Pham and Hill, 2008).

In this study, only 2.48 per cent of the total sample identified as seasonal migrants. Nearly all these respondents originated from West Africa and had chosen to travel short distances within the region. Seasonal migration tends to be a male economic strategy, with 96.75 per cent of seasonal migrants being male. Most seasonal migrants are young adults rather than youth – nearly half reported being aged 25–34. Less than half (41.23%) of seasonal migrants originated from Burkina Faso, followed by those coming from the Niger and Guinea.

A key informant noted the difficulties organizations face when seeking data on seasonal migration, which is, in part, a reflection of the complex, evolving strategies that these migrants are often compelled to resort to:

*“We do not have data on seasonal migration (in the region). But we know that a month ago, 1,600 Nigerian migrants were referred to us for help. They were working at an informal gold site where there was increased violence against them so they had to come to Burkina Faso.”*

### 3.3.4. MIGRATION ROUTES

Despite robust efforts to document the routes migrants take to move within the region, data remains scarce and inaccurate. This is, in part, due to the constantly changing migration control and asylum policies that directly impact the free movement of migrants and smugglers’ operations and, in turn, lead to rapid changes in migration routes. As one key informant explained:

*“[...] They change their route based on the smugglers’ information on which road is safer than others. At one point, everyone was going through Algeria, but then this route was cut off, so smugglers tried to redirect the flows through Morocco and Mauritania. It depends on rumour – what is going on the ground. See migration like water – if you block something, the water is going to find another way. Migration will try to find another way”.*

The Niger’s anti-smuggling law, as well as intensified patrolling at its main crossing points, has diverted migrants to more remote and dangerous routes, creating a serious data gap on the routes that migrants follow. As a key informant noted:

*“All movements north are considered to be irregular and are criminalized. This law has been more and more enforced by the Government, which has made the routes more and more fragmented. The more routes become underground and fragmented, the more difficult it is to assist and get a sense of what is going on.”*

The recent COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures taken to prevent its spread have further affected migration routes and modalities, causing new complexities not captured in available data. As two key informants noted:

*“What is interesting is that there is an inter-State ban and yet people are still moving. [...] Journeys that used to cost USD 1 to 2 now cost USD 50, ambulances [as a mode of migrant transportation] now cost USD 1,000 [to hire].”*

*“Inter-city movement is still blocked. This has made the journey quite difficult because they often use public transport. This blockade has limited the means of transport that smugglers use, which was usually disguised as normal movement.”*



Trafficked children draw nets under the supervision of a "slave master" in Tonka, a small fishing community on the shores of Lake Volta. These children work from dawn to dusk, are poorly fed and never get paid.

## 4. PROTECTION CHALLENGES, RISKS AND HAZARDS ALONG THE ROUTE

### 4.1. PROTECTION GAPS ACROSS THE WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICAN CORRIDORS

Protection challenges characterize much migration, particularly when journeys are long, partially funded and, in some cases, irregular. A better and in-depth understanding of these challenges will reveal critical gaps in current migration policies and protection measures, a precondition for developing an evidence-based harm-prevention framework. This current study did not aim to rank the protection challenges or understand their impacts at an individual level. It simply set out to document the journeys undertaken and particularize the demographic characteristics of the migration flows examined.

Although this study succeeded in reaching approximately 110,000 participants, the survey had a low response rate when exploring protection challenges, with only 20,289 participants providing answers to the question, “Have you been facing any specific difficulties during this journey?” The low response rate should not be interpreted as an indication that the respondents did not face any difficulties and challenges during their migration journeys. The low response rate may ultimately be attributed to IOM guidelines on the participation of vulnerable people in research and the application of Protection Information Management principles, which require that a protection question be asked only if a referral mechanism exists to provide assistance to respondents who need it. The fact that referral mechanisms to address migrants’ needs were lacking at numerous FMPs emphasizes the importance of providing more support for migrants. Another possible explanation could be that some respondents might have felt reluctant to provide an answer to this question. It is important that future surveys at the FMPs document the reasons why this could be so. Regardless of the reason, however, it should be noted that the study took place in a dynamic and challenging environment that made data collection on migrants’ needs and experiences during their journeys rather challenging. Also, surveys could only be conducted in locations accessible by IOM enumerators, leaving other migration routes that might bear additional risks uncovered.

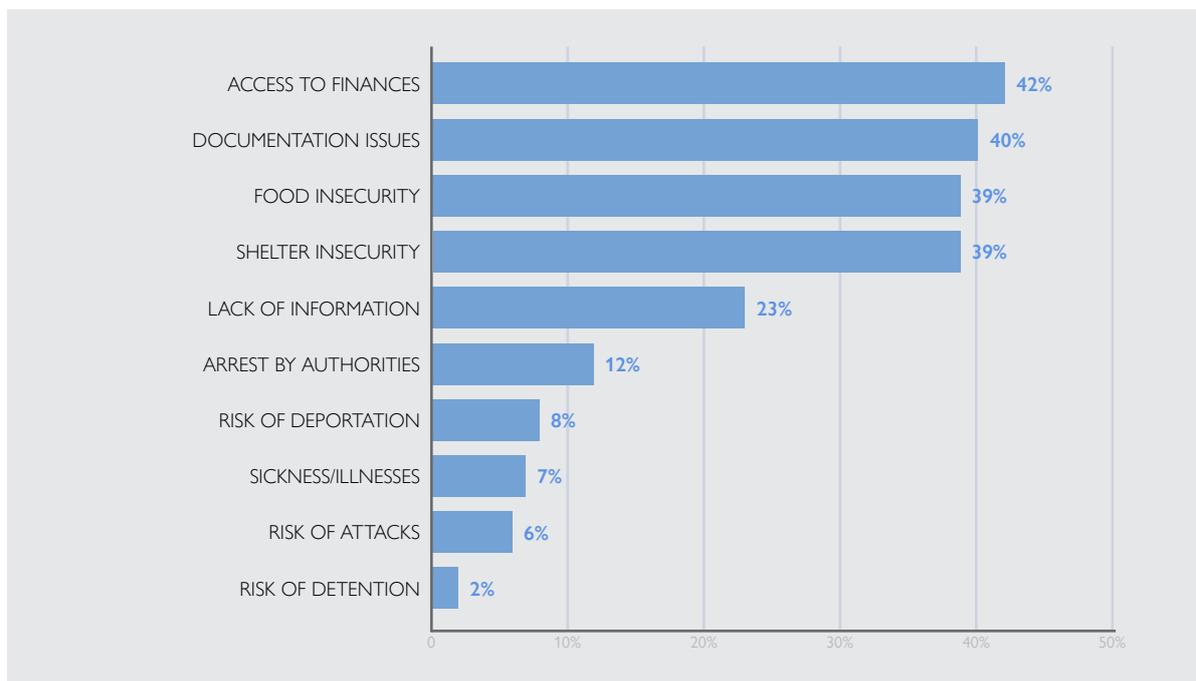
Among respondents providing an answer to the question (20,289 in total), 38.35 per cent (or 7,781) reported having difficulties during their journeys, with West Africans significantly more likely to report difficulties than Central Africans (41.16% versus 23.84%): The majority of respondents reporting difficulties were Guinean and Malian. A finding emerged that female respondents, regardless of age, faced a higher likelihood of difficulties and challenges than their male counterparts. Among both genders, older adults and the elderly were more likely to report having faced difficulties than young adults and youth.

More than three quarters (78.54%) of respondents who identified as being forcibly displaced reported facing difficulties in comparison to 21.46 per cent of those migrating voluntarily. The latter group might have had greater opportunities to mitigate journey risks even prior to departure.

It should be noted again that the conclusions about the kinds of difficulties respondents faced were derived from the answers of only 7,781 respondents, who replied “yes” to the question, “Have you been facing any specific difficulties during this journey?” Of those respondents, 24.02 per cent (or 1,869) could not specify the difficulty they faced and opted for the “difficulty unknown” response. The findings on the specific difficulties and protection gaps respondents faced presented in Figure 12 were derived from by the responses of 5,912 respondents who:

- Gave a positive response to the question, “Have you been facing any specific difficulties during this journey?”
- Reported the challenge they were facing, rather than reporting “difficulty unknown”.

Figure 12. Difficulties faced by the participants along the journey



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

## 4.2. ACCESS TO FINANCIAL RESOURCES, DOCUMENTATION, FOOD AND SHELTER

Respondents were asked to describe up to three difficulties they were facing at the time of the survey. Among respondents who reported having difficulties and challenges they could describe or specify, 42.76 per cent reported financial problems; 40.92 per cent, issues with documentation; 38.99 per cent, food insecurity; and 38.94 per cent, lack of available shelter.

These reported difficulties are interrelated. Financial problems lead to food and accommodation insecurity, while lack of documentation can prevent physical access to shelters. Youth appeared to be more susceptible to financial and documentation issues than other age groups.

Slightly less than half (47.39%) of female respondents reported documentation problems, compared to only 39.53 per cent of males. However, females were less likely to face financial issues than their male counterparts, (29.11% and 45.68%, respectively). This may have been a consequence of the fact that most female respondents, regardless of whether they faced difficulties or not, travelled in a group rather than alone, which may imply that someone else in the group was responsible for securing resources for the journey. As this is merely an assumption or conjecture, more research on this topic is needed.

A third (33.62%) of the respondents who identified financial drivers as the main reason behind their decision to migrate reported facing financial challenges en route. A key informant further noted that migrants are more prone to financial difficulties during the last part of their journey:

*“[Financial difficulties become most challenging] in the final part of the journey, because migrants [would] have crossed many borders [by then]. They have been stopped and they have no resources left – they need to find jobs, to find gold mine sites to work. They face a lot of economic and financial difficulties – they have no financial resources [with which] to finance [the rest of] their journey.”*

On the other hand, respondents who reported migrating due to targeted violence or persecution (49.55%) were more likely to face documentation problems than respondents reporting that they were migrating for income generation opportunities (33.85%). Similarly, those that reported being forcibly displaced in their country also had a higher rate of reporting documentation issues – 45.75 per cent of those who were forcibly displaced faced difficulties related to documentation, compared to 19.36 per cent of those who did not report to be forcibly displaced. These migrants were often unable to replace documents they had left behind, were destroyed as a result of precipitating factors that caused the migrants’ displacement or lost during a sudden (and often violent) displacement (Kälin and Entwisle Chapuisat, 2018). This inability impedes migrants’ access to services along the migration route, increasing their vulnerability to risks such as abuse and exploitation. Half of these respondents reported difficulties securing adequate shelter, a challenge faced by a smaller percentage of respondents who had migrated voluntarily (35.44%).

**Text box 12. Nationalities reporting the most difficulties**

Guinean, Malian and Burkinabe were the nationalities that most commonly reported difficulties encountered during the course of their migration. Almost half of the Guinean respondents reported attacks against them, food and shelter insecurity, documentation issues and mental health issues. Almost one out of three Guineans mentioned facing financial issues and the threat of deportation. Nearly two thirds (63.3%) of them reported that the lack of information posed a significant difficulty for them. As mentioned previously, however, these findings should be interpreted with caution, given that only a small fraction of participants answered the question.

### 4.3. LACK OF INFORMATION

Lack of information was reported by 23.3 per cent of the respondents who reported on the challenges they faced. Disaggregating the data, lack of information was reported as a challenge by 51.9 per cent of respondents contemplating migration to Europe, compared to 19.35 per cent of those whose intended final destination was within Africa. Although migrants do attempt to secure information about their destination and options, they have no control over the reliability of information sources and the validity of the information they receive, leading to information deficits while en route (Kälin and Entwisle Chapuisat, 2018). A key informant further explained this challenge:

*“We often hear a lot about lack of information – which is [both] true and false – migrants are very well connected for better or for worse. There is a lot of fake news – it is difficult to have actual quality information. There is a lot of disinformation and misinformation.”*

Young respondents are significantly more likely to complain about the lack of information than other respondents, according to the data, pointing to the urgent need for access to quality information in countries of origin and along migration routes to ensure that children and young people are well informed, particularly when they are travelling alone. A key informant further stressed the need for access to accurate information, explaining the stressful situation that migrants, particularly those who rely on smugglers, find themselves in:

*“Nothing is clear for them in terms of where they need to go – [they are] always in limbo from start to finish. They never really know what is going to happen at different points [of their journey]. There are around 97 informal border crossings that people use to travel. Right next to an immigration point [might be] someone’s farm – [migrants] can cross by using motorbikes. There are whole villages that are run by traffickers and smugglers. [... Migrants] are at the mercy of these agents. It is unbearable and agonizing for migrants [not knowing what is next for them].”*

### 4.4. ASSAULT, ATTACKS AND INJURIES

A small but significant percentage of the respondents who reported facing challenges mentioned exposure to physical harm as one of the difficulties along their journeys. Incidents of attacks were reported by 5.83 per cent of respondents, and 1.77 per cent complained of physical injuries. (Data about the perpetrators and the circumstances surrounding these attacks were not obtained.) Central African respondents were more likely to report attacks and physical injuries than their West African counterparts. Interestingly, exposure to attacks was reported more by respondents reporting a final destination within Africa, with only 1.27 per cent of those intending to reach Europe reporting attacks and none reporting injuries.

Male respondents were more likely than females to report attacks. However, the survey was limited to physical attacks and injuries and did not examine risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking, all

of which tend to affect female migrants more.<sup>12</sup> Interviews with key informants shed more light on the topic. As one key informant explained:

*“For Chadians who go to work in the mineral fields, trafficking is a major issue – they are promised [a job abroad] and then when they arrive [at the destination country] they are beaten, jailed, exploited and not paid. [Traffickers target] children as well, who are recruited from IDP camps or schools.”*

Another key informant explained how the limited and often inaccurate knowledge migrants have of human trafficking turns them into easy victims of well-established trafficking networks operating in the region:

*“Children are not well-informed about the situation: These trafficking networks are recruiting children to work in the mineral fields. These networks are very strong, sometimes stronger than the Government. [...] We have seen a number of nurses who have been recruited from the southern part of Chad, with promises to work in Libya, but in the end, they are asked to be nurses for children working in the mineral fields. No one can escape – they are beaten and mistreated. There are many lies.”*

Many key informants provided anecdotal evidence on the increased risk of sex and labour trafficking and exploitation facing migrant women. A key informant provided a distinct example:

*“Speaking about the Mali situation, it is similar in Burkina Faso: We know that there are women being trafficked into the country, but we do not have [the] numbers to prove that there is a trend. Young women are promised by [the] family, uncle, friend – someone they do not know. They are promised a job – in a bar in Dakar, in a supermarket in Europe, etc. – and when the women arrive here with the help of the trafficking network, [...] they are asked to reimburse all the costs of their travel – usually around CFA 1.5 million.<sup>13</sup> They have to have paid sexual intercourse to pay [off] the debt. We have many cases like that. They can find themselves at bars but also at gold [mining] sites.”*

Another key informant further explained how the trafficking system is well-connected, involves traditional leaders and exploits cultural beliefs to coerce women, turning their escape into a Sisyphean task:

*“There are trafficking networks that particularly target women in the south of the country. Certain arrangements – which involve traditional leaders and beliefs, including voodoo – puts women in a situation where they are expected to comply without means of questioning the arrangement. [...] Irregular migration chains help them get handed over from one end to the other. These women are considered relatively easy to manage and control”.*

12 See the “Limitations” section for more details on why these questions were excluded.

13 The West African franc (CFA) is the currency of eight independent states in West Africa. CFA 1.5 million is equivalent to approximately USD 2,700.

## 4.5. IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT: DEPORTATION AND ARRESTS

Deportation is a common tool deployed in immigration enforcement (Kretsedemas and Brotherton, 2018) – one that affects considerable numbers of migrants globally. Deportation was mentioned as a difficulty by 8.04 per cent of the respondents reporting the challenges they faced. By adopting a region-wide protocol on free movement, West Africa is generally more open to migration than Central and North African countries, which have adopted increasingly restrictive migration policies in response to externalization migration policies adopted by Europe. Therefore, a vast majority of respondents are expected to be able to move freely within the region (see, e.g.: Betts and Milner, 2006).

Respondents that reported having been forcibly displaced in their own countries reported being less likely to face deportation than their non-forcibly displaced counterparts: 8.87 per cent of respondents that did not report being forcibly displaced in their countries faced deportation-related issues, compared to only 1.47 per cent of those that were forcibly displaced, suggesting that migration policies enable forced migrants to move across countries. The data also shows that deportation is not a common challenge for female respondents, as it affected only 2.9 per cent of female respondents

A small percentage (12.2%) of respondents complained of arrests by authorities, with youth, males and low-skilled respondents more likely to be arrested than older, female and highly skilled respondents.

### Text box 13. What challenges do migrant women face?

The difficulties that migrant women face while in transit have not been comprehensively documented. Existing data focus mostly on female exposure to discrimination, violence, and exploitation, with less attention given to other protection gaps, such as access to documentation or antenatal care and services, or to their strengths and resilience (Lemus-Way and Johansson, 2020; MMC, 2018). The temporary and, in some instances clandestine, nature of transit migration further exacerbates this data gap. An understanding of the difficulties that women face while migrating across West and Central Africa can help fill this gap and bolster a robust harm-prevention protection model.

Less than half (44.26%) of female respondents that reported facing difficulties en route identified obtaining adequate identity documents to be their most pressing concern. Food and shelter insecurity followed, reported by 37.76 per cent and 32.7 per cent, respectively. Among the small sample of female respondents travelling alone, reports of food insecurity were more frequent, while accommodation insecurity was reported more frequently by females travelling in groups.

For females travelling alone, the lack of opportunities to contact the family they left behind – so often a source of protection – increased the impact of these challenges as well as their vulnerability to harm. As a key informant noted:

*“One challenge [for migrants] is that often it is difficult to be in touch with their families – and this is particularly challenging for women – which are a protective measure if they are experiencing exploitation and abuse.”*

Financial issues were reported by 27.19 per cent of women and lack of (access to) useful information by 14 per cent. The percentages of women covered by this study who were experiencing violence while in transit were relatively small, but some important findings emerged nonetheless. The risk of arrests was reported by 4.79 per cent of women respondents, while 2.71 per cent cited deportation as a difficulty, and 2.44 per cent mentioned attacks against them. The risk of arrest was the same for both women travelling alone and those who were part of a group, but the risk of deportation increased for women travelling in groups, while the risk of being attacked increased for women travelling alone. Finally, 5.42 per cent of the female respondents reported facing difficulties but could not name or specify the difficulties they faced. Although female respondents did not elaborate on the attacks and arrests they experienced, key informants provided insights by explaining how migrant women faced increased risks of sexual violence perpetrated by security forces. As a key informant explained, victims are reluctant – for cultural reasons – to share such experiences and seek help, further exacerbating their trauma and vulnerability to harm:

*“Migrant women are subject to sexual harassment, rape. [...] It is something that is happening a lot. [It] happens with [women victimized by] security forces. Some of them come out and talk about it, but in this part of the world the majority of them do not.”*

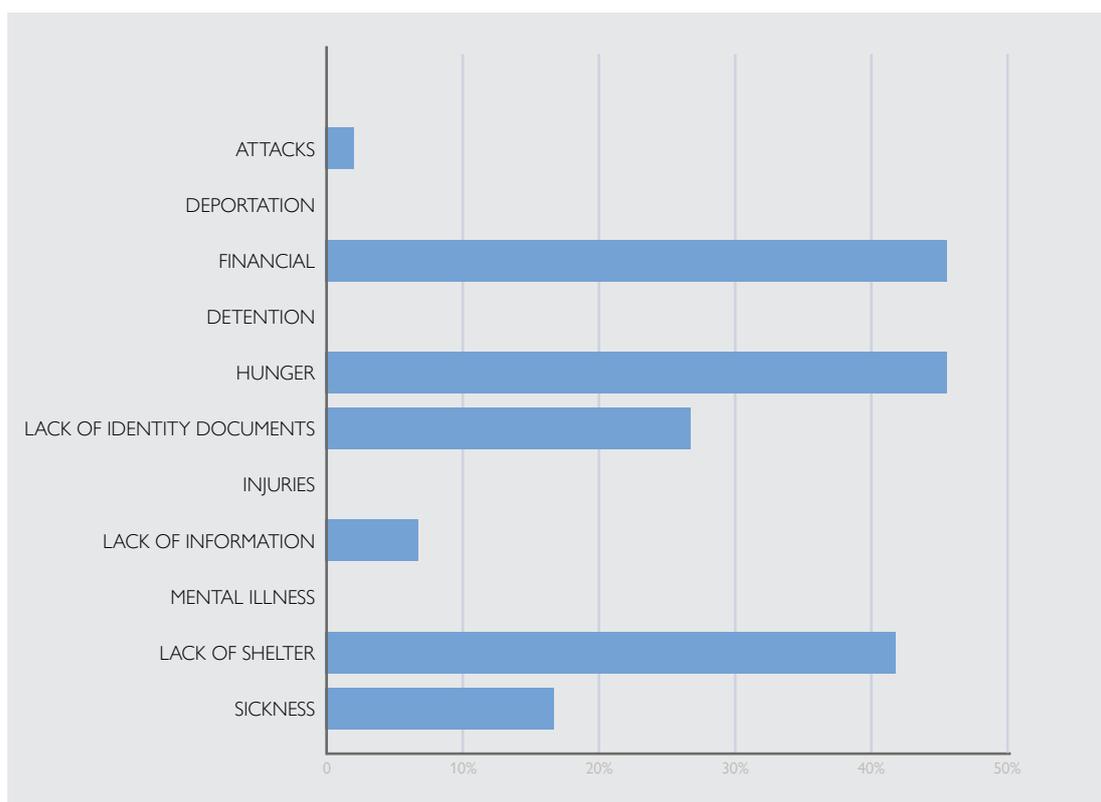
#### Text box 14. What challenges do unaccompanied children face?

Children face a series of threats to their safety and well-being while on the move. These threats are exacerbated while children are travelling alone and have left their familiar and protective societal environments. In the context of this study, hunger and financial issues appeared to be the most common challenges, as reported by 46.43 per cent of child respondents travelling alone who reported facing challenges, whether specified or unspecified (“difficulty unknown”) (Figure 13). The need for financial resources to cover the cost of daily needs while en route or to finance the continuation of the journey force children to gravitate towards illicit (and, therefore, dangerous) money-making activities, exposing them to deception, coercion, exploitation and abuse.

Accommodation insecurity and documentation issues were mentioned by 42.86 per cent and 28.57 per cent of child respondents, respectively. Lack of documentation leads to a series of interconnected protection gaps for children ranging from stressful (and often problematic) age assessments and prolonged detention, to limited access to available services – challenges that increase children’s vulnerability to abuse and exploitation (Terrio, 2015; UNICEF, 2002).

A fifth (21.43%) of respondents reported facing the risk of arrests by authorities. Attacks, injuries and sickness were mentioned by a relatively small number of children – however, given their gravity, they still constitute an urgent protection priority.

Figure 13. Common challenges faced by children on the move



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

## 4.6. NECESSARY INFORMATION WHILE IN TRANSIT

When respondents were given the opportunity to identify the type of information they would have benefited from while migrating through West and Central Africa, only 3,143 participants (<3% of all respondents) provided an answer. There are many plausible explanations for this low response rate: First, respondents may have made preparations prior to their journey and believed they had all the information they needed, regardless of whether this information was reliable or not. Second, respondents may have already had their own sources of information ranging from networks in transit and destination countries to the Internet – and which may even include smugglers. They may therefore have felt well-informed. As a key informant noted:

*“We all now have access to cellphones. Simple phones [that cost] USD 80 allow you to watch videos [about migrating] and everything. [...] Media and easy access to quick information tempt people more than ever before. You can send a personal message to someone directly to get information on how to migrate. [...] There are so many traffickers making so much money out of sharing information.”*

More data, however, is needed to fully understand migrants’ perceptions and the drivers for such a low response rate.

Despite the low rate response, the study yielded some useful findings. A little over a third (35.51%) of these respondents expressed the need for accurate information about the risks and protection challenges they would encounter along their route of choice. This response suggests widespread concern among respondents about the likely outcome(s) of their migration decision on their and their family’s safety. A key informant further shared his experience about the importance of this kind of information, particularly when inaccurate or misleading information is widespread:

*“The first thing they need is information about their safety – for example, they have to travel through the desert and they do not even know the conditions in the desert. [...] A smuggler or a person who organizes the journey can tell stories about the journey and how safe migrants will be, but it is not really accurate information.”*

Information about job opportunities along migration routes was desired by 29.36 per cent and 16.4 per cent, respectively, of respondents who expressed a need for more information about the modalities of return and about relevant legal considerations. With a relatively low number of respondents highlighting the need for legal information, key informants stressed how critical it is for migrants to know their legal rights:

*“We have been focusing a lot on the dangers of migration. What I have seen is that people – when they are told it is dangerous to migrate – they do not take this into consideration. [...] They knew it was dangerous and that they would be raped. They are aware of the risks and this does not discourage them. For me, it is more important to tell people about their rights.”*

In a similar vein, another key informant highlighted the need to talk to migrants about the documentation they need to be able to travel – knowledge that can inoculate them against corrupt practices and smugglers' deception:

*“They need to have more information about what documents they need to make it possible to travel. [...] More than 80 per cent of those migrants we encounter do not have any identity documents. When they are face-to-face with authorities, they can be victims or asked to pay much money to continue their migration. Also, they may be extorted further by smugglers because they do not have the [necessary] documents.”*

As previous studies show, migrants' decisions to move towards specific destinations were also driven by migration policy barriers (REACH, 2017). Migrants' decision-making is often influenced by barriers that they perceive they would likely face and can push them to consider alternative destinations or routes. In fact, this study showed that the longer the planned migration journey, the more information migrants needed. A staggering 93.99 per cent of respondents who expressed a need for information had embarked upon extracontinental migration to Europe. The most sought-after information, as reported by 67.88 per cent of respondents, was about the potential risks they would face.

The study further showed that different age groups have different information needs: Youth were more likely to request information about risks and challenges than other age groups. The need for information shifts increased with migrants' age, with young adults equally requesting information about job opportunities and dangers along their intended migration route (32.53% and 32.4%, respectively), and older adults requesting information about options for returning home and available job opportunities there (25.88% and 31.66%, respectively).

Information about job opportunities and migration risks are of equal importance for migrant women, with 29.79 per cent and 30.32 per cent of them, respectively, requesting these types of information. Interestingly, there are no gender differences when it comes to information about job opportunities – evidence that female respondents moving within and out of West and Central Africa are not passive participants in the migration process but, rather, active decision makers for whom migration may have the capacity to be “empowering and liberating” (Tittensor and Mansouri, in: Tittensor and Mansouri (eds.), 2017). Further, female respondents are more likely than males to request information about migration policies in destination countries and significantly more likely to request more practical information such as availability of accommodation and transit centres.

West Africans were significantly more likely to be in need of information than Central Africans. West African respondents tended to request more information about the risks and job opportunities along their intended migration routes, while the majority of Central African respondents requested information about the return process – evidence of the different migration concerns among migrants from these different regions.

The need for information about risks and dangers was significantly higher among respondents who had just started their journeys and tended to drop significantly as they spent more time en route (more than six months), while the need for information about job opportunities, always considerable, tended to increase with time spent en route. The need for more practical information, including available accommodation and transit centres, seem to increase in a similar fashion.





Muna Garage IDP camp in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

## 5. MIGRANT VULNERABILITY TO PHYSICAL HARM ACROSS THE CENTRAL AND WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

Vulnerability is a product of circumstance rather than an inherent characteristic of persons. Knowledge of the factors that increase migrants' vulnerability to harm and exploitation is limited to specific forms of vulnerability. A large number of studies have examined vulnerability to human trafficking in specific migration corridors, such as the Eastern Mediterranean route; much less is known about other regions (see, e.g.: UNICEF and IOM, 2017; UNICEF and IOM, 2017; IOM, 2016). To successfully expand the range of understanding of vulnerability and fill existing knowledge gaps in this issue, a more interactive and holistic examination is necessary (O'Brien et al., 2004; Cardona, in: Bankoff et al. (eds.), 2004).

Vulnerability, in general, is conceptualized as the main driver of a person's current and future exposure to risk, tends to vary according to the specific characteristics and unique experiences of that person. This conceptualization applies to migrants and their unique vulnerabilities. The interaction of prevailing contexts that play a significant role in migrants' trajectories – such as social, familial, environmental, political, economic, legal and historical factors – generates specific vulnerabilities and related outcomes. This study draws on the Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability (DoMV) model of IOM in its discussion of migrant vulnerability and resilience (IOM, 2019b). This approach considers the interaction between individual, familial, community and structural factors before, during and after a migration journey and their compounded impact(s) on migrants' vulnerability and resilience to harm (IOM, 2019b).

Data presented in the previous chapter demonstrated which factors tend to increase migrant vulnerability to particular risks and dangers – which range from food and shelter insecurity to exposure to violence and attacks, all of which are outcomes that impact migrants' physical and psychological well-being in different ways. For example, based on the survey results, female respondents were exposed to greater risks and challenges overall while en route than male respondents, but were less at risk of deportation and arrests, and were significantly less at risk when they were travelling in groups.

Data also shows that age plays an important role in defining vulnerability to harm, with older respondents facing more difficulties and dangers than younger respondents. However, this finding should be interpreted carefully. While older adults are exposed to a higher risk of being deported or arrested by State authorities (a risk that is low for children and young people), youth have a higher risk of facing financial problems or documentation issues, which are factors that exacerbated their vulnerability to exploitation.

Migrants' region of origin is shown to be a significant factor that interacts with other factors such as the migration route chosen. West African respondents seem to be more susceptible to financial difficulties or documentation issues while en route; Central African migrants, on the other hand, are more vulnerable to attacks, arrests and injuries. In the same context, originating from specific countries (rather than regions) seem to further increase or decrease migrant vulnerability to harm. For example, coming from Guinea and Mali – countries with weak social networks and supportive systems – is shown to be a risk factor for ill-treatment while en route, leading to increased instances of injuries, attacks and arrests.

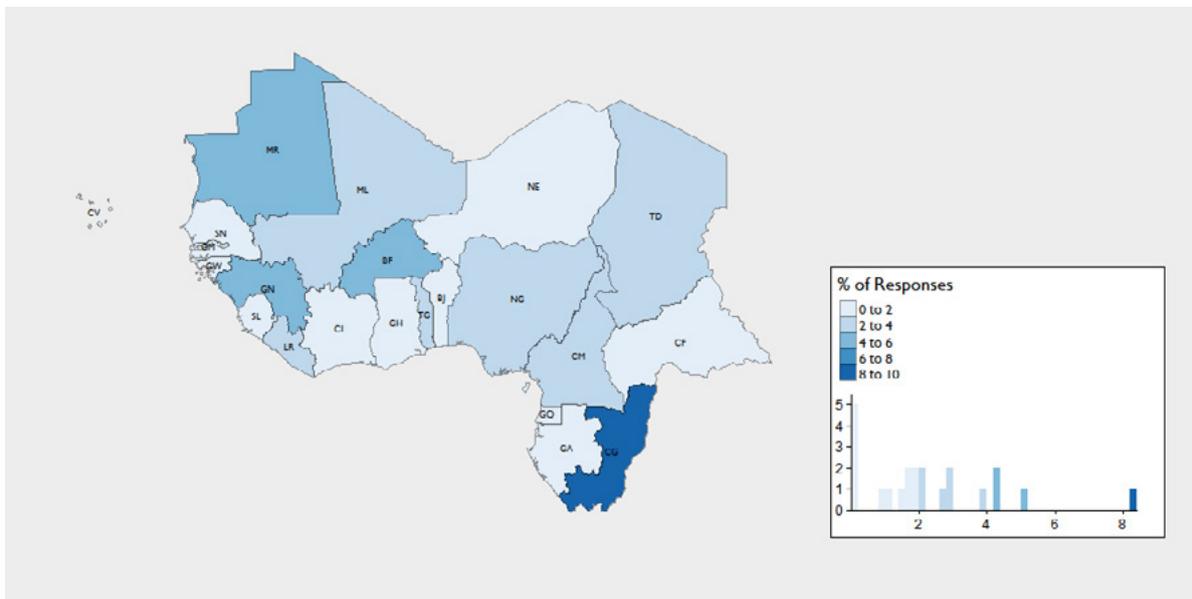
In an effort to understand the factors that protect against or contribute to the vulnerability to physical violence and abuse across the West and Central African migration corridor, a logistic regression model<sup>14</sup> was fit, with both risk and protective factors included as covariates.

## 5.1. METHODOLOGY

### 5.1.1. DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

For this analysis only, the outcome variable was generated from surveyed migrants’ “difficulties faced during migration”. Specifically, a binary outcome for “harm” was generated, such that an affirmative expression of experiencing attacks, assault, injury or deprivation of freedom (“held against my will”) indicated a positive value (harm = “1”), with an expressed negative response indicating no experienced harm (harm = “0”) (Figure 14). Since the model intended to predict the effect of covariates that increased vulnerability to physical harm, responses pertaining to immigration enforcement, limited access to food and shelter, and financial security were not included when defining the outcome variable

Figure 14. Percentage of migrants that reported experiencing any harm, by nationality



Source: Prepared by the FXB Center based on the study data, January 2021.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration. Countries are labelled with their respective ISO alpha-2 codes.

14 Logistic regression is a predictive analysis that is run in order to explain the relationship between one dependent, binary variable and one or more independent variables.

The independent variables included in the model were based on the DoMV model of IOM that were captured in the survey (IOM, 2019b). These include:

- (a) Individual factors: age (categorical variable), sex (male or female), level of education (ordinal), employment status prior to migration (categorical) and multiple migration attempts (“Yes” or “No”);
- (b) Familial factors: travel status (alone or in a group);
- (c) Structural factors: region of destination (categorical) and year of migration (2018 or 2019);
- (d) Individual, familial, community and structural factors: drivers of migration (factor variables).

#### Text box 15. The Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability model

According to the DoMV model, individual factors include:

*“migrants’ status in society; their physical and biological characteristics; their histories and experiences; their beliefs and attitudes; their individual emotional, psychological and cognitive characteristics; and their physical and mental health and well-being. Individual characteristics are a central element of vulnerability and resilience, as they mediate how individuals respond to household/family, community, and structural contexts.”*

Household and family factors include:

*“family size, household structure, socioeconomic status, employment, livelihoods, gender discrimination, and family dynamics.”*

Community factors include:

*“Availability of quality educational opportunities, health care and social services; equal access to resources; livelihood and income-generating opportunities; the natural environment; and social norms and behaviors.”*

Structural factors include:

*“Histories of colonization and conflict, political systems, migration policies and governance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.”*

(IOM, 2019b, pp. 6–7)

Participants that did not respond to this question were not included in the final sample for the model, and no missing data were imputed prior to model selection. As a result, the total number (N) of survey participants included was 18,420.

#### Model selection

All independent variables listed above were included in the full models for this analysis. To balance the tradeoff between parameter estimation accuracy and a relatively small sample size that may result in a high type-1 error, we used the least absolute shrinkage and selection operator (LASSO) to eliminate covariates from the model that contribute little to our outcome of interest, while retaining the variables that have a true, important effect (Tibshirani, 1996). In order to determine the appropriate amount of shrinkage in covariates, three model selection methods were tested for our logistic regression model: (a) model selection using cross-validation (M1), (b) model selection using the minimum Bayes Information Criterion (BIC) (M2), and (c) model selection by adaptive LASSO (M3). Model assumptions

and forecasting performances were tested against each other through independent out-of-sample validation, and goodness-of-fit statistics for each model were compared based on the post-election coefficients (as compared to the penalized coefficients).

## 5.2. RESULTS

The final model included 15,098 survey respondents, from an included sample of 18,420. The model with the best trade-off of accuracy and inference was M3, involving variable selection using adaptive LASSO. Participants were dropped from the final model due to complete separation, and the reported confidence intervals reflect profile likelihood accounting for this. The final model was examined to make sure that no theoretical confounders were left out or automatically dropped due to multicollinearity and controlled for sex, age, travel status, journey reason, year, education, remigration, marital status, occupation and destination.

Age and travel status were retained in the model as significant confounders between the relationship of other independent variables and the outcome – although they were not, by themselves, statistically significant independent predictors of harm. This could be a result of the small number of respondents spread across the age groups (no 65+ respondent and only 5 children reported “harm”), and the effect size of age may be indeterminable due to a lack of power – alternatively, the effect of these may be captured in the coefficients of other variables included in the model. Additionally, response options for “Did not want to answer” were left in this model and not re-coded as missing data, due to its non-random missingness that may have an effect on either the outcome or the effect of related covariates.

### 5.2.1. GENDER (INDIVIDUAL FACTOR)

While the discussion previously highlighted how female respondents are exposed to higher risk while on the move in comparison to their male counterparts, the independent effect of sex as a predictor of harm showed that males had a 2.17 increased odds of reporting “harm” compared to female respondents. The discussion earlier commented on increased female likelihood to move in groups, and a plausible explanation for this might be the compounded effect on vulnerability to harm of travelling alone, being younger and lacking the financial resources to support their journey. The increased likelihood of migrant women possessing other risk factors – and the independent increased odds of males experiencing harm – underscores gender as one of the most critical factors that defines vulnerability to harm.

### 5.2.2. DRIVERS OF MIGRATION (INDIVIDUAL, FAMILIAL, COMMUNITY OR STRUCTURAL FACTORS, DEPENDING ON THE SPECIFIC REASON THAT DROVE MIGRATION)

Migrants displaced due to targeted violence and persecution are particularly vulnerable to abuse and harm while en route, with 13.6 increased odds of reporting physical harm when compared to those migrating seeking income generation opportunities. Similarly, those escaping war were 3.2 times more likely to report physical harm than those migrating seeking income generation opportunities. Previous studies have widely documented instances of abuse and violence in refugee camps across the West and Central Africa region (UNHCR, 2002 and 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2018). Further, the involuntary, violent and often sudden nature of their migration leaves them little time to gather necessary resources and information, or to prepare for a high-risk migration attempt, turning them into easy targets of violence and exploitation and easy victims of injuries.

The analysis also showed that those respondents migrating to rejoin family are 2.01 times more likely to experience harm when compared to those migrating for economic reasons.

### 5.2.3. MULTIPLE MIGRATION ATTEMPTS (INDIVIDUAL FACTOR)

Respondents' attempts to migrate in the past tend to be a factor for increased vulnerability to harm and violence, as according to data, respondents with a migration history are 2.01 times more likely to report harmful practices compared to those traveling for the first time. During their first journey migrants tend to exhaust all financial resources in order to reach their destination. If the first attempt does not meet the migrant's or their family's expectations, theirs, and/or the family's ability to finance a second migration attempt is compromised. This situation forces many would-be migrants into situations where they may become victims of exploiters and crime networks (Brachet, in: Berriane and de Haas (eds.), 2012).

### 5.2.4. EDUCATION (INDIVIDUAL FACTOR)

The analysis pinpointed education as a protective factor that guards against physical harm. More specifically, the data showed that, compared to those with no education at all, respondents who obtained primary education, secondary education, or attended Koranic schools have lower odds of experiencing physical harm.

### 5.2.5. REGION OF DESTINATION (STRUCTURAL FACTOR)

In general, those travelling longer distances or migrating across regions and continents with a range of migration policies and hazardous corridors tend to be exposed to greater harm compared to those travelling shorter distances and within the same region. The current study, however, shows that respondents intending to go to Europe had significantly lower odds of experiencing harm and violence than their counterparts whose final destinations are within Africa. Multiple factors and their interaction should be considered when analysing these results to ensure an accurate interpretation, including participants' travel status, age and gender, the purpose of their journey, and the mode of travel. In this study, for example, the majority of respondents in situations of increased vulnerability to harm, such as those forcibly displaced, tended to reach a destination within the continent rather than out of it, a trend that could explain this finding.

### 5.2.6. YEAR OF MIGRATION (STRUCTURAL FACTOR)

The analysis showed that migrating in 2019 was associated with lower odds of harm, as respondents travelling in 2019 had 0.37 times the odds of experiencing harm as respondents who migrated in 2018. This finding could be a result of the measures that the African Union took to address migration in a more integrated manner; however, more data is needed for more solid conclusions.

Table 1. Regression analysis results

Covariates	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	p-value
Sex	Reference		
Female	2.17	1.47–3.20	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Male			
Age category	Reference		
14–24	1.04	0.82–1.32	<b>.021<sup>a</sup></b>
25–34	0.72	0.48–10.08	
35–64	(null)		
65+			
Travel status	Reference		
Alone	1.16	0.93–1.44	.18
Group			
Drivers of migration	Reference		
Economic reasons	0.90	0.44–1.84	<b>.771</b>
Access to services	(null)		
Natural disasters	2.11	1.62–2.76	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Others	(null)		
Re-join family	13.63	6.05–30.71	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Studies	(null)		
Targeted violence or persecution	3.22	2.01–5.16	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Tourism	4.01	2.31–6.99	<b>&lt;.001</b>
War/conflict			
Others			
Education	Reference		
None	0.72	0.54–0.97	<b>.03</b>
Primary	0.76	0.57–1.00	<b>.05</b>
Secondary	1.22	0.76–1.97	.41
Tertiary	0.56	0.29–1.06	.08
Professional or post-graduate	0.60	0.37–1.00	<b>.05</b>
Koranic school	0.67	0.37–1.23	.20
Other			
Re-migration	Reference		
No	2.01	1.60–2.53	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Yes			
Marital status	Reference		
Single	0.77	0.59–1.00	.05
Married	0.41	0.13–1.34	.14
Divorced	0.57	0.07–4.53	.60
Widowed	6.41	3.27–12.58	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Other/Did not answer			
Employment	Reference		
None	0.22	0.07–0.74	.01
No answer	(null)		
Retired	0.35	0.25–0.49	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Self-employed	0.62	0.37–1.03	.06
Student	0.64	0.47–0.88	.007
Unemployed and looking for a job	0.62	0.36–1.08	.09
Unemployed and not looking for a job			
Destination	Reference		
Africa	1.53	0.20–11.94	.68
Americas	1.00		
Asia	0.09	0.05–0.16	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Europe	1.00		
Oceania			
Year	Reference		
2018	0.37	0.29–0.47	<b>&lt;.001</b>
2019			

N=15,098

<sup>a</sup> = p-value for trend





IOM, in collaboration with the Government and with funding from the European Union, supports the establishment of livestock farmer groups in Burkina Faso. In east- and south-central Burkina Faso, the two main regions of origin of migrants leaving this country, IOM has provided about 500 sheep, rams, oxen and donkeys to 99 Burkinabe migrants who returned from Libya and Algeria in 2018, to ensure their socioeconomic reintegration in the country. To support their sustainable reintegration, the returnees received – in addition to this in-kind assistance – training in business management, cooperative operations and livestock farming techniques. The training sessions, provided throughout the year by the technical partners of the National Employment Agency (ANPE) and the Regional Directorates of Animal and Fisheries Resources, have enabled the returnees to acquire the necessary skills to ensure the sustainability of their activities. In 2018, 1,249 Burkinabe migrants received reintegration assistance under the EU–IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration. Funded by the European Union, this project aims to contribute to strengthening the migration, governance, protection, assisted voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of returning migrants.

## 6. MIGRATION FLOWS WITHIN AND OUT OF WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: RISKS AND CHALLENGES

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the border shutdowns implemented across the region to prevent its spread had an immediate and unprecedented impact on migration flows. With harm prevention policies and measures largely absent in the headlong rush to lockdown, the pandemic posed grave threats to migrants on the move, who were either forced to return home (Bhabha and Digidiki, 2020a) or found themselves in perilous conditions where the global health instruction to observe “social distancing” carried little to no meaning (Bhabha and Digidiki, 2020b).

Though quantitative data collection for this study was completed before the pandemic broke, interviews with key informants took place in late April 2020, when COVID-19 related restrictions and policies were at their peak. To take advantage of this unique opportunity to gather some preliminary data from experts directly witnessing the impact of the pandemic on migrants, the research team asked key informants to share their experiences, including the challenges they faced while assisting migrants during the pandemic. Although this preliminary data cannot be used to make generalizations, it can lay the ground for further, more targeted research.

### 6.1. CONTINUING AT ANY COST

As a response to COVID-19 sweeping across West and Central Africa (UNICEF, 2020) a series of State and regional travel restrictions were put in place, immediately preventing a significant number of migrants from traversing key transit points. One key informant tried to quantify the impact based on preliminary observations by IOM:

*“Lockdowns everywhere [led to a] reduction in mobility, which is straightforward. Closed borders have caused a 32 per cent reduction in mobility in the region on average.”*

According to majority of key informants, these new obstacles did not dissuade migrants from embarking upon already-planned journeys. However, coping with the new restrictions meant employing more dangerous and more costly means. The cost of migration has increased significantly, with increased costs documented in areas where movement was once free but is now restricted by responses to COVID-19. As a key informant explained:

*“Journeys that used to cost USD 1–2 now cost USD 50. Ambulances [that are used to smuggle people] now cost USD 1000. [...] The reality is that it has an extremely negative impact on migration because people are taking more risks – larger groups of people tend to travel together in tight quarters. [...] Yesterday, in one of the states, over 150 people died.”*

### 6.1.1. STRANDED IN NO MAN'S LAND

The rush of many West and Central African countries to close borders in the wake of COVID-19 (Bouet and Labourde, 2020) compounded the protection challenges already plaguing migrants, both regular and irregular, on the move. Within the first days of the measures, thousands of migrants in transit were at borders and in transit centres (IOM, 2020g), unable to move, with no way of knowing when they would be able to resume their journeys, and with no access to basic services while in the midst of the pandemic. According to available data, as soon as the Government of the Niger closed the country's borders, 764 migrants were stranded in quarantine at the country's border with Algeria and another 256 at its border with Libya (IOM, 2020h).

As the number of stranded migrants at known transit points across the region continues to grow, severe shortages in the provision of services have been documented, with tensions among migrants in transit shelters running high. One key informant explained how transit centres were overcrowded and operating beyond capacity, and how governments' lack of preparedness to deal with the pandemic made the situation even more challenging:

*“1,500 people are in our assistance centres. We have had to close our transit centres to new referrals because they are full. We cannot help anyone depart [due to border closures, and there is] the added challenge that, in an epidemic, having a lot of people in a facility together is a big problem. Our beneficiaries are essentially stuck. We received many migrants who could not cross the borders. We set up a quarantine [facility] – people are being monitored by the Government. There is a large reliance on international actors to handle this situation”.*

Another key informant further explained how this new challenge further increased the challenges for migrants in situations of increased vulnerability to harm, forcing international actors to implement rushed measures to provide solutions to stranded migrants – solutions not always aligned with migrants' interests:

*“With COVID-19, borders have been closed – they are porous so there are still movements. [...] 1,700 people who tried to reach the Niger were victims of violence in the [mining] sites. We had to provide on-the-spot assistance, to negotiate with authorities in the Niger and Burkina Faso and with donors to provide assistance just like that. We don't have the means – our capacity for housing is almost full.”*

### 6.1.2. CHALLENGES IN REINTEGRATION

The pandemic has had an impact not only on people on the move but also on those trying to regain their lives back home after a successful or unsuccessful migration journey. According to key informants, the reintegration of returnees – an already challenging process due to the multilayered barriers returnees face (see, e.g.: Digidiki and Bhabha, 2019a) – has become even more difficult as the outbreak placed most returnees in worse situations than the ones they had left behind. According to one key informant:

*“Almost 96 per cent of the migrant returnees that we surveyed said that they were in a way worse financial situation compared to before the outbreak, with half of them in extremely worse-off situations. They were not able to generate income, which stopped them from supporting themselves. Also, they felt a similar impact on their family members, who would normally support them until they are up on their feet. Around 9 per cent of these respondents reported that their emotional well-being had deteriorated. Psychologically, socially and economically, COVID-19 has exacerbated the situation.”*

While the data presented in this chapter could not extensively document the impact(s) of COVID-19 (and, therefore, conclusive findings cannot be generated), it does lay the ground for further research. Despite its limitations, the rapid assessment pointed out that the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus severely impacted the fundamental rights of people on the move. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the measures implemented to curtail it, caused three interlocking crises for migrants: (a) a health crisis, (b) a socioeconomic crisis and (c) a protection crisis – crises that brought them additional challenges and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities to harm (United Nations, 2020). Inclusive public health responses are necessary to ensure that migrants are not trapped in dangerous situations where both their health and safety are jeopardized. Responses to the pandemic should be considered successful not only when they lead to a drop in infection rates, but when they do so while fully respecting migrants’ rights and ensuring access to life-saving assistance. If responses do not prioritize States’ obligations to migrants seeking protection, there is a real danger that this crisis will result in irreversible rights violations and consequent harm to migrants.



Since 2019, the IOM in West and Central Africa has been using street art as a key outreach activity, based on "human-centred design," to engage with migrants and community members. In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, IOM continues the initiative in Senegal, Ghana and the Niger with the objective of improving relations between migrants and host communities, while stimulating the debate on how to reduce the spread of misinformation and xenophobia, two particularly sensitive topics during COVID-19 times.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on data from multiple migration points and mixed migration flows, this large-scale study aimed to provide a dynamic and comprehensive understanding of West and Central African migration trends and migrant vulnerability in order to inform the design of targeted, inclusive, rights-centred responses and a more effective harm-prevention framework. What emerges clearly from the analysis offered in this report is that migration is not homogenous, but differs greatly across the region, with majority of people on the move choosing to stay on the continent. Migrants moving within and out of the region have different socioeconomic characteristics, distinctive cultural, familial and socioeconomic backgrounds, and varying financial resources and support networks. These differences emerge as key factors that determine migration trajectories, affect the linearity of the journey, and impact individual exposure, vulnerability and resilience to risks and dangers. Given the tightly intertwined geographic, cultural, political, humanitarian and economic conditions affecting the West and Central Africa region, migration must be seen for what it is: an integral part of many societies and a strategy that contributes to migrants', their families' and their communities' resilience and development (see, e.g.: IOM, 2020e).

Targeted migration responses should focus on mitigating widespread risks and dangers and on addressing the multifaceted needs that migrants face across migration routes. These responses will not be effective if they do not consider the heterogeneity of migrants and the complexity of their mobility – both of which are factors that generate different risks, needs and vulnerabilities – even when migration routes and journey modalities are the same. Any attempt to design a response based on vague and broad categories of migrants will fail, as these categories are unable to reflect the great variety of individual experiences.

The need for tailored harm prevention migration responses is particularly apparent in the context of migrants in situations of increased vulnerability to risk and harm. The recommendations below, anchored on the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, set out key actions for consideration by IOM and other international agencies engaged in responding to the protection challenges facing migrants, as well as national governments, in the context of West and Central African migration.

## RECOMMENDATION 1: Enhance access to support services along migration routes

- (a) Improve access to essential services, such as health and legal services, along migration routes to ensure effective service delivery and reduce exposure to risks and dangers. For example, a small but significant number of migrants reported being sick or facing mental health symptoms while en route. Prompt access to reliable and competent services reduces the risk of exploitation.
- (b) Establish open and accessible information points for migrants at transit points along different routes to provide information about access to services (e.g. job opportunities, health services, provision of food and access to shelters), return and reintegration processes, and legal advice. Resource centres should also be established and run by specially trained personnel to provide information and support services relevant to women and children specifically. Established resource centres should be able to provide information and assistance to all migrants regardless of their migration status.
- (c) Provide accurate, timely and comprehensible targeted information to migrants in situations of increased vulnerability to risk and harm, including women and children, regarding their rights and protection and the supportive resources available to them. When providing this information, take into consideration the migrants' age, language(s) spoken, trajectories and pertinent cultural factors to maximize the usefulness of the information being shared.
- (d) Ensure that specific services like legal assistance are accessible to all migrants, including those who may experience particular challenges accessing such services (e.g. detainees).
- (e) Strengthen the provision of psychosocial services along migration routes to increase resilience among migrants.

### Listening to key informants' voices

*“Some migrants have developed some sort of mitigation mechanisms such as accepting what happened, which leads to psychosocial issues. [...] Some of them say, “We have faced all of these challenges, we have experienced this our whole life.” They accept it. They do not have any other option. We need experts to provide specific [psychologica] support and help.”*

– Key informant

## RECOMMENDATION 2: Ensure and enhance the availability of pathways for regular migration

- (a) Strengthen international cooperation and promote bilateral and multilateral agreements that will ensure safe, orderly and regular migration based on labour market needs and skills. Skills development should be an integral part of these agreements and should facilitate the matching of migrants' skills and available income generation opportunities.
- (b) Expand access to work permits for unskilled and semi-skilled workers available in manufacturing, service, tourism, health care, agricultural and other industries where labour shortages abound.
- (c) Establish economic opportunities that will be based on labour exchange programmes among countries in the same region, tied to work permit acquisition. In this way, migrants seeking income generation opportunities can migrate regularly to a neighbouring country to benefit from an opportunity that may not exist in their own country.
- (d) Expand options for academic mobility through scholarships and paid education opportunities to enable adolescents and young people to move to other countries for education, skills training and apprenticeship.
- (e) Ensure the availability of visas on humanitarian grounds to those with protection concerns falling outside the refugee protection regime.
- (f) Ensure access to rapid family reunification procedures for migrants, employing measures that "promote the realization of the right to family life and the best interests of the child" (Global Compact for Migration Objective 21, Action (i)).

### Listening to key informants' voices

*"This is one of the biggest issues: the rate of rejection of visas. So many people get rejected – it is easier for them to pay an agent to migrate. Many people have given up on legal routes of migration to Europe. Nobody can get all of the information that is required to do it legally [and what the requirements are – booking, letter from employer, etc]."*

– Key informant

*"We need to actually make the regular migration option work better – regular migration to major destinations in Europe and in the region. We say there is a free movement protocol, this needs to come with some possibilities. There are some partnerships with Member States to mainstream identification across borders, but still there is a lot more to be done in order to make this a regular option and regular channel in the country."*

– Key informant

### RECOMMENDATION 3: Awareness-raising and access to information

- (a) Finance and support national awareness-raising campaigns in origin countries to ensure prospective migrants have access to accurate information about regular migration options, including entry and stay in destination and transit countries, and about migration routes, risks and dangers. These public information campaigns should provide accurate details about human rights entitlements, responsibilities and safe options, and should not be presented as official efforts to deter all forms of migration. Their goal should be to help people intending to migrate realize their human and legal rights and make informed decisions about their migration options.
- (b) Engage return migrants as part of information campaigns to act as messengers by sharing their own experiences, allowing for easy circulation of accurate information.
- (c) Publicize available opportunities in migrants' countries, as well as within their region. For those migrants that avoid seeking information from official sources:
  - (i) Identify key individuals, such as community and religious leaders, who can serve as "information hubs" and assist with the spread of accurate information in the community.
  - (ii) Different channels of communication should be employed as conveyers of information to ensure that everyone has access to accurate information without necessarily having to seek it out individually. These channels can include both traditional media and social networking platforms (e.g. Facebook and WhatsApp), as well as non-digital communication channels such as community radio and street announcements.
- (d) Ensure that awareness-raising campaigns are multilingual, gender-responsive, evidence-based and accessible to everyone, and that materials are disseminated in ways that would be beneficial to people with little to no education (e.g. through the use of visual aids). These campaigns should be developed in collaboration with target beneficiaries and local communities.
- (e) Ensure that awareness campaigns reach the whole country, including more isolated areas, as recruitment can take place anywhere in the country and especially in remote areas as part of human trafficking operations.
- (f) Ensure that awareness campaigns are tailored to the needs of the different migrant groups, which include children, women, men and the elderly. Schools, IDP camps and shelters, and places with people at high risk of being recruited by traffickers are all venues that should be covered by information campaigns.
- (g) Ensure that information campaigns targeting children and young people will not treat them as passive victims of trafficking networks but will instead honor their agency and individuality.
- (h) Ensure that migrants are aware of available protective resources in cases of abuse and exploitation offered near and throughout the routes they take.
- (i) Finance and support awareness-raising campaigns in popular transit and destination countries to combat xenophobic beliefs fuelled by false information and rumours. Establish mechanisms that will allow for effective monitoring and evaluation of these campaigns, to particularly ensure that no harm is inadvertently caused.



Teacher's Village IDP camp in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

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*“Even if they receive this information, there is a tendency to not believe the facts – they know and believe that there are bad things happening to people, [...] but this has not changed their minds. Neighbours, friends and family members – migrants who already have been [abroad] – inform them. Some migrants in Libya inform them about how, if they endure the journey, they will have better opportunities than they would have at home.”*

– Key informant

*“Sharing information is not enough. We need to get people who have survived the migration journey to convince people about what the experience actually is – the agony, torture and bitterness. It will be more effective to hear from them than it would be from [someone like] me who works for an international organization.”*

– Key informant

*“People need to know the reality of the exact situation in the northern part of the country, especially in the mineral fields. Also, they need to know the situation in Libya. Most of these people – these children in schools who are recruited by traffickers – they are told that they will become rich from El Dorado [...]. We need to make sure these people are as informed as possible.”*

– Key informant

## **RECOMMENDATION 4:** Invest in enhancing the capacity of agencies and governmental actors

- (a) Provide all public servants charged with responsibilities that bring them into contact with migrants with rigorous training in human rights principles, including non-discrimination obligations, rights to humanitarian protection and considerations of the best interests of the child, irrespective of migration status. Introduce gender- and child-sensitive training for officials who work with these constituencies.
- (b) Ensure that stakeholders in direct contact with migrants in situations of increased vulnerability to risk and harm, including migrant women and children at transit points, are well trained in identifying migrants at high risk of exploitation.
- (c) Implement training and awareness-raising initiatives targeting stakeholders and governments, focusing on the nexus between migration and human trafficking.
- (d) Share good practices for addressing protection challenges at the micro-level so they can be replicated.
- (e) Given the complex background of migrants moving within and out of the region, as well as their need to access services and information, ensure that stakeholders – particularly those providing health and legal services – have intercultural competence and are sensitive to age and gender to allow them to build healthy, trusting relationships with migrants when providing services.

## RECOMMENDATION 5: Create livelihood opportunities in origin and neighbouring countries

- (a) Conduct labour market assessment in transit and origin countries to identify local gaps that could be filled by a migrant workforce.
- (b) Based on the labour market assessments, create sustainable livelihood opportunities at the local and regional levels to prevent long-distance journeys or secondary movements that can increase vulnerability. These opportunities can be part of efforts to address the drivers of migration, as well as of sustainable return and reintegration programmes.
- (c) Ensure equal access to economic opportunities for women in both origin and neighbouring countries.
- (d) Provide skills development programmes, particularly to women and youth, relevant to local labour market needs.
- (e) Address unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape that prevent people from accessing job opportunities.
- (f) Develop guidelines and standards that will allow for mutual recognition of migrants' qualifications to ensure skills compatibility across the region.

### Listening to key informants' voices

*“Solutions are in entrepreneurship and relaxation of laws. [We] need to cut the bureaucracy – sometimes you need to go through 10 people to get a job.”*

– Key informant

*“We can talk about all that we want in terms of information [about irregular migration], but if we are not offering an alternative, [people] are going to give migration a shot.”*

– Key informant

## RECOMMENDATION 6: “Facilitate safe and dignified return and readmission, and sustainable reintegration” (Global Compact for Migration, Objective 21)

- (a) “Ensure that return and readmission of migrants to their own country is safe, dignified and in full compliance with international human rights law, including the rights of the child” (Global Compact for Migration Objective 21, Action (a)). This is particularly critical during the COVID-19 era, where return may take place in a disorganized and rushed way, making it difficult to adhere to safeguarding procedures.
- (b) Expand outreach campaigns in critical and popular transit and destination points along different corridors to ensure that migrants have accurate and timely information about the return process; available return and reintegration programmes, including reception, care and reintegration arrangements; and the current situation in the country of origin.
- (c) Ensure returnees have access to short-term support programmes in order to provide them with a transitional safety net while they navigate the reintegration process. In the long term, ensure equal access to social protection and services, justice, psychosocial assistance, vocational training, employment opportunities, recognition of skills acquired abroad and financial services to ensure sustainable reintegration and development in the country upon return.
- (d) Ensure that the individual reintegration activities offered are able to respond to the needs and priorities of returnees by conducting assessments of their communities (IOM, 2017a).
- (e) Involve family and community members into the psychosocial reintegration process of returnees to ensure that returnees successfully re-establish their networks.
- (f) Conduct regular follow-ups with returnees to monitor their reintegration process and provide timely assistance.
- (g) When it comes to the return and readmission of children, ensure that a determination of their best interests is always carried out and that protocols for best-interests determinations are followed effectively despite countervailing pressures. Also, ensure that a legal guardian or a specialized official accompanies the child throughout the return and readmission process (Global Compact for Migration, Objective 21, Action (g)).

### Listening to key informants’ voices

*“We do not yet have a strong mechanism to determine the best interests of migrant children. In the past, we followed a designated guardian protocol and follow family tracing to evaluate the conditions of return for the child, gather the approval of the child, then the child protection services send us a file and they make a decision as to whether he returns to his country of origin. In Burkina Faso, it takes time and the Government wants the process to be very fast – the risk is that migrant children might be returned before all of the [necessary] process[es are] conducted.”*

– Key informant

## **RECOMMENDATION 7:** Collect accurate, disaggregated and in-depth data

- (a) Conduct regular systematic studies on protection challenges that migrants face along the different migration routes. Utilize the full range of tools for tracking migrant information, including crowd-sourced mobile phone locations, information about services available to migrants and their quality, while ensuring that rigorous privacy protections and firewalls to secure the confidentiality of individuals' personal information are in place. Additional information that is useful for promoting a holistic understanding of and response to migrants' protection needs include the following:
  - (i) Social and cultural capital employed to finance the journey and the enduring consequences of drawing on those sources of support;
  - (ii) The role of intermediaries in completing the journey;
  - (iii) The drivers behind multiple migration attempts, the way they happen, and the associated risks;
  - (iv) The risks and dangers associated with specific transit points and routes.
- (b) Conduct systematic studies to document and measure the impact of protection measures across different routes and corridors, applying the DoMV model as a framework for analysis and programming.
- (c) Beyond quantitative data, collect more rich, in-depth data on the diverse backgrounds of migrants in situations of vulnerability to risk and harm, including migrant women and children, and how their particular circumstances affect their migration decision-making and trajectories.
- (d) *For IOM specifically:* Ensure access to referral mechanisms at all FMPs. This will also allow for the collection of information about protection challenges and risks across all FMPs and for a comparison between different sites and different migration flows, thus ensuring a holistic understanding of the protection challenges faced and, therefore, more targeted programmatic responses.

## RECOMMENDATION 8: ENHANCE EFFORTS TO PREVENT, COMBAT AND ERADICATE HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE REGION

- (a) Ensure that counter-trafficking responses are incorporated in all humanitarian relief operations across the different routes. Protective resources should be tailored to the needs of women and children as well.
- (b) Increase the capacity of counter-trafficking teams to ensure adequate and timely response to cases.
- (c) Collaborate with governments to ensure that counter-trafficking teams have access to victims hosted in government-run shelters and that access to assistance is facilitated by enabling administrative procedures.
- (d) When it comes to child victims of trafficking, ensure that the best interests of the child have been considered prior to making any decisions, including by tracing any potential implications for the child's family in the trafficking process.
- (e) Increase prevention efforts by strengthening awareness-raising campaigns.
- (f) Collaborate with governments at a policy level to ensure timely and effective investigation and prosecution of traffickers at the national and transnational levels.
- (g) Ensure that responses in place address the particular vulnerabilities of adult women and men, and boys and girls who are at risk of becoming victims of trafficking.

### Listening to key informants' voices

*"We do not have many actors engaged in a counter-trafficking response. We have developed training models with police officers and investigators. There are efforts to strengthen these governmental structures, but we do not have access to these women, so we do not have the exact numbers. We assist people who are referred to us by NGOs, migrants or the Government – it is difficult for victims of trafficking to call us and tell us that they need help."*

– Key informant

*"We need to fight against impunity, fight for the prosecution of traffickers. We need to not just help victims but help prevent victims – we have not helped in this way."*

– Key informant

*"When it comes to children who have been victims of trafficking – especially girls – we need to check first if the family is implicated in the trafficking process. For now, there is good collaboration, but this is thanks to the national mechanism that has been drafted by IOM and a joint mechanism with the European Union."*

– Key informant

## RECOMMENDATION 9: Collaboration and coordination among stakeholders and governments

- (a) Foster coordination and collaboration between national governments, United Nations agencies, and local NGOs, by defining roles and responsibilities, minimizing redundancies, and maximizing constructive collaboration in providing services.
- (b) Work closely with governments to improve national and regional policies to ensure migrant access to services regardless of their migration status, in recognition of their rights. This is particularly important in the case of children's and women's rights.
- (c) Reinforce interregional coordination between different organizations and governments to ensure that all vulnerable to harm groups, including children and women, are protected across all stages of their journey.
- (d) Streamline referral and assistance mechanisms to ensure smooth and quick response to migrants' needs.
- (e) Assist governments in building programmes and strengthening support structures where experience, expertise and capacity are lacking. Ensure that embassies and consulates in different transit and destination countries have the capacity and knowledge to provide the necessary information and assist migrants when needed.

### Listening to key informants' voices

*“What is more efficient is when the Government is interested and engaged in [specific] thematic, [for example, combatting] human trafficking. It depends on whether or not we have a champion [in the Government] to advance these issues; it makes it easier to advocate for these policies. [...] We need the support of the Government, which is key.”*

– Key informant

*“We need to strengthen structures – whether it is for women or children. Support that they expect from embassies and consulates is virtually non-existent. This is a big source of vulnerability. If it was not for IOM or some other organization to reach out and assist, they cannot expect anything from their country of origin. Structurally, this is a major problem.”*

-Key informant



"I was sold, exploited. My former recruiter contacted me to help her recruit new girls. I refused! I have been through hell and I do not wish it on anyone," says Tate, a trafficking victim.

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## 8. EPILOGUE

Working towards a more targeted harm-prevention response will not be enough to protect migrants in situations of vulnerability to risk and harm if safe and regular migration options are not made available to them. As geopolitical and social conditions in many countries continue to deteriorate, and while climate change directly affects the livelihood of people all over the world, more migrants of all ages and genders will be forced to make distress decisions and migrate without being able to secure the necessary resources, information and support structures. Adequate and targeted prevention and protection measures will be critical to ensuring that these migrants reach their final destinations without the need to resort to criminal, exploitive networks that endanger their lives, livelihoods and future prospects.



A tailoring atelier.

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