



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

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

KEY TRENDS

- Regional migratory flows decreased sharply between January and April 2020, by 48 per cent.
- The closure of border has left 17,000 migrants stranded
- 2,000 transhumant herders are stranded at borders.
- 2,000 migrants are waiting at IOM transit centers and unable to return to their home country.
- Over 12,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) displaced by the crisis in North West and South West Cameroon returned to their location of origin.
- The number of forced returns from Algeria and Libya to Chad, Niger and Mali grew.

REGIONAL MOBILITY

MIGRATION FLOWS

↓ -39% Regional Migration Flows (Jan-May 2020)

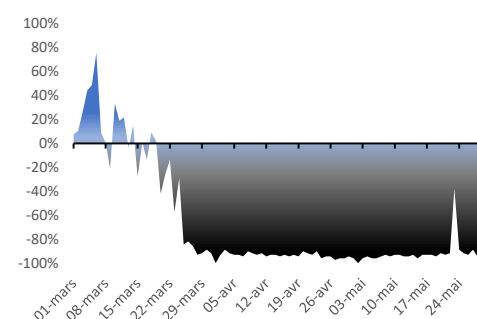
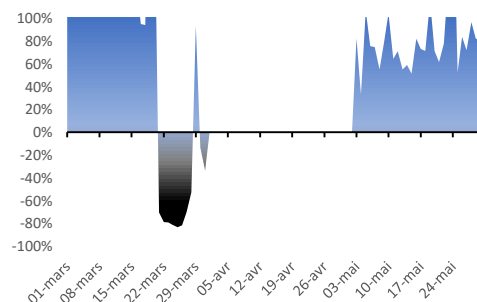
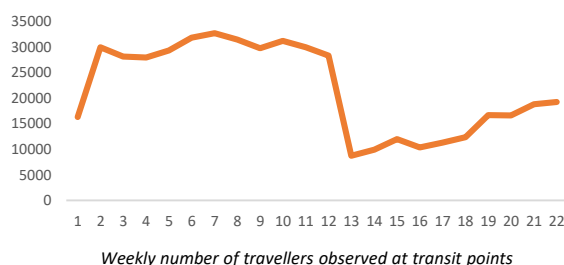
The COVID-19 epidemic has upended regional mobility in West & Central Africa. IOM, through its Flow Monitoring activities, observed a **39 per cent decrease in migration flows** between January and May 2020 at key transit points across the region.

↑ +65% Regional Migration Flows (Apr-May 2020)

After witnessing a striking **drop in flows in March**, which coincides with the period during which the number of COVID-19 cases grew and countries in the region started imposing travel bans and enacting border closure measures, the number of travellers observed at transit points **grew substantially in April and May**. Between April and May 2020, recorded flows jumped by 65 per cent.

Movements at FMPs varied significantly. While some FMPs, such as Dan Barto in Niger or Faya in Chad, witnessed increases in May 2020, when compared to the same period in the year 2019, other FMPs, including Gogui in Mali and Sokoto in Nigeria, saw stark decreased between May 2019 and May 2020.

These differences may be the result of differences in enforcement of border closures as well of **movements of population** including the movements of **seasonal laborers**; and the **return of migrants** to their countries of origin.



Differences in flows recorded at the Dan Barto (Niger) and Gogui (Mali) FMPs between May 2019 and May 2020



MOBILITY RESTRICTION MEASURES

International borders continued to remain closed throughout West and Central Africa. Nevertheless, in May 2020, countries throughout the region continued the process of easing restrictions and reopening internal mobility. Thus, lockdowns and curfews were lifted or eased in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea Senegal. Meanwhile, States of Emergency, which had been declared in multiple countries, were lifted in Cabo Verde, Cameroon, The Gambia

In other countries, measures and restrictions have been kept in place and in some instance have been extended or reinforced. In Togo, for instance, a state of sanitary emergency was declared on 12 May. Likewise, in Guinea, the state of emergency was extended and confinement conditions tightened, although other measures, such as limits on gatherings, were eased. In Nigeria, lockdown measures were extended.



Commercial, and in some cases humanitarian and cargo flights were banned in Congo, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, and stringent additional measures put in place to limit the spread of the epidemic, which has spread rapidly in these countries. This included the closure of restaurants, schools, which had been briefly reopened.

*Internally displaced women in Maiduguri receive psychosocial support in spite of the COVID-19 crisis
 © IOM/Elijah Elaigwu*

BORDER ASSESSMENTS – POINTS OF ENTRY

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

Across the West & Central Africa region, **422 Points of Entry** were identified, out of which 339 Land Border Points (80%), 41 Blue Border Points (10%) and 42 Airports (10%). In addition, IOM identified **198 Internal Transit Points (ITPs)**. The vast majority of PoE (94%) were **official PoE**, while 6 per cent were **non-official**.

Out of the 620 PoE and ITPs for which information on the operation status is available, close to half (173, or 47%) were **closed both entry and exit**. 93 points, or 25 per cent, on the other hand were **open for both entry and exit**. Meanwhile, 28 per cent were closed but **open for commercial traffic** and transport of goods.

422
POINTS OF ENTRY

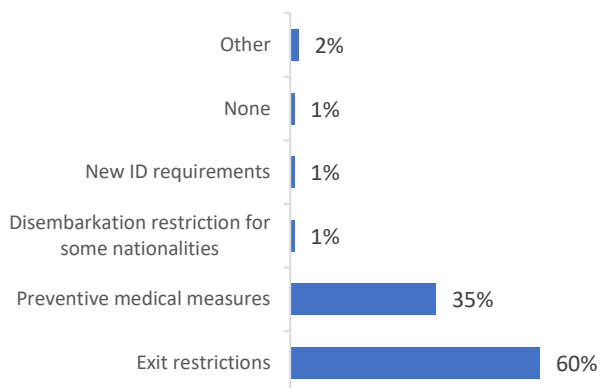
ASSESSED BY IOM IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

25% OPEN
28% PARTIALLY OPEN (trade only)
47% CLOSED

94% OFFICIAL
6% NON-OFFICIAL



BORDER ASSESSMENTS – MEASURES AND RESTRICTIONS



Restrictions or measures enacted at Points of Entry

A number of **measures restricting mobility or imposing additional entry requirements** have been set up at various Points of Entry across the region. These include **restrictions to exit the location** (at 226 PoE, or 60% of PoE for which data is available) or the implementation of **preventive medical measures**, including mandatory quarantine and health screening of travellers (at 130 PoE, or 35%). Other measures, such as forbidding disembarkation for nationals of some countries, changes in ID requirements needed to disembark, or the requirement to present a medical certificate displaying a negative COVID test result have also been implemented at a small number of PoE.

MOBILE POPULATIONS

STRANDED MIGRANTS

 **17,000**
Stranded migrants

 **1,500**
Migrants in quarantine

 **2,000**
Stranded transhumant herders

Measures restricting mobility have had substantial impacts on migrants in West & Central Africa, and have left at least **21,000 migrants stranded** throughout the region. Indeed, thousands of migrants who were attempting to **cross international borders** and were prevented from doing so, while many migrants sought to **return home** but were unable to do so.

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

A notable consequence of the closure of borders and restrictions of mobility is the stranding of transhuman herders at international borders. Transhumant herders travel seasonally, often across borders, in search of water and pasture for their cattle, and the closure of borders threatens their way of life and risks robbing herders of their livelihoods and generating tensions with local communities. In Mauritania, an estimated 2,000 transhumant herders are currently blocked along the borders with Mali and Senegal.

In addition to migrants being stranded, over 1,500 migrants have been placed in quarantine as a preventive measure to control the spread of COVID-19. However, these migrants are often



MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT CENTRES & ASSISTED RETURN

 **78,000**
Assisted returns

IOM assists migrants who wish to go home but lack the means to do so to return on a voluntary basis, safely and in dignity to their countries of origin. Since 2017, IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Program has assisted with the return of **over 78,000 migrants** in West & Central Africa. Of these, **32,000 received economic support** to assist reintegration in their home communities.

 **1,900**
Migrants in transit centres

Restrictions on mobility and border closures imposed by governments throughout the region have severely hampered AVRR activities. Close to **2,000 migrants are currently waiting in IOM Transit Centres**, stranded and unable to go home. As numbers grow and mobility restrictions prevent IOM from assisting in the voluntary return of migrants, many Transit Centres become overcrowded, exacerbating tensions and psychological stress and making it more difficult to enforce social distancing and implement preventive measures.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

 **8M**
Internally Displaced Persons

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

As of 31 May 2020, there was one confirmed COVID-19 case amongst displaced populations. However, large number of cases were identified in areas with high concentrations of displaced populations, including in Nigeria's Borno State and Chad's Lac Province, raising the possibility of future infection.

 **1**
COVID-19 cases in displacement camps

Moreover, this count is possibly an underestimate due to limited testing capacities in displacement camps.

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

