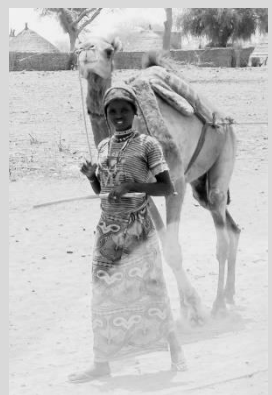


# THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FREE MOVEMENT AND MIGRATION IN NIGER

IOM Niger – Migration Data & Research Unit

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**FMM West Africa**  
Support to Free Movement of Persons & Migration in West Africa



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## ACRONYMS

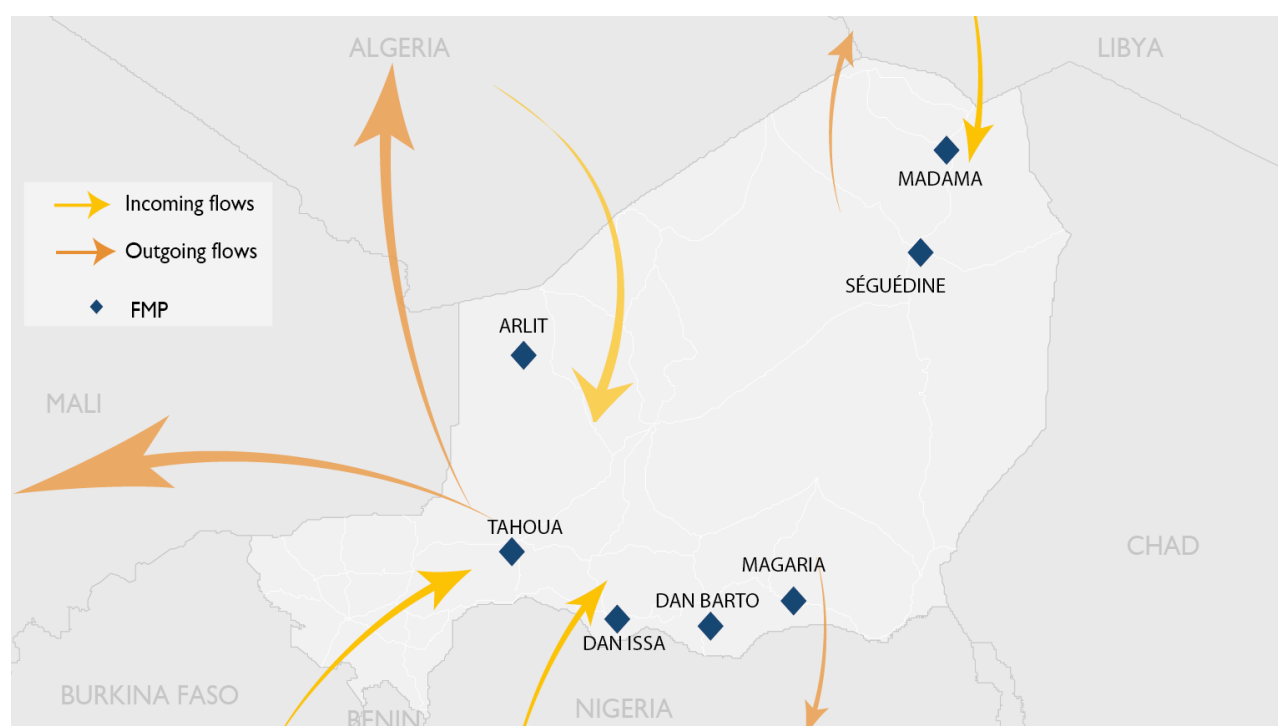
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FMP	Flow Monitoring Point
FMR	Flow Monitoring Registry
FMS	Flow Monitoring Survey
IOM	International Organization for Migration
PoE	Point of Entry

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

Located in the southern part of the Sahara, Niger is historically at the heart of population movement, connecting people from West Africa and North Africa, as well as other parts of Africa through ancient trade routes. Today, Niger is a country of destination and transit for population movement from countries within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region towards North Africa and Europe.<sup>1</sup> Internal migration is the dominant form of migration of Nigerien migrants, along with circular migration within the sub-region and neighbouring countries such as Algeria and Libya. Map 1 below illustrates the incoming and outgoing flows of migrants captured through IOM's Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs).<sup>2</sup>

Map 1: FMPs geographic coverage



Circular labour migration in Niger is primarily a coping strategy for food insecurity, a means to improve livelihood, alleviate chronic poverty and increase opportunities to supplement household income.<sup>3</sup> The decision to migrate is most often tied to crop failure due to environmental degradation<sup>4</sup> and lack of money to meet basic needs such food, and to purchase medicines, clothing, and the general inability to meet household expenses.

<sup>1</sup> International Organizations for Migration, Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC). *Rapport d'évaluation sur les données relatives à la migration au Niger* (Berlin, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> FMPs are locations known to have important migrant flows set-up at entry, transit or exit points such as border posts, bus stations or sites, or transit centres. Data collected is limited to migration flows entering and exiting Niger at 7 points of entry; *Incoming flows*: Migrants movement coming from another country by crossing an international official boarder(s); *Outgoing flows*: Referring to migrants' movement in an area with the real intentions to cross an official boarder (s) for another country;

<sup>3</sup> FAO IFAD IOM WFP: *The Linkages between Migration, Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development*, 2018.

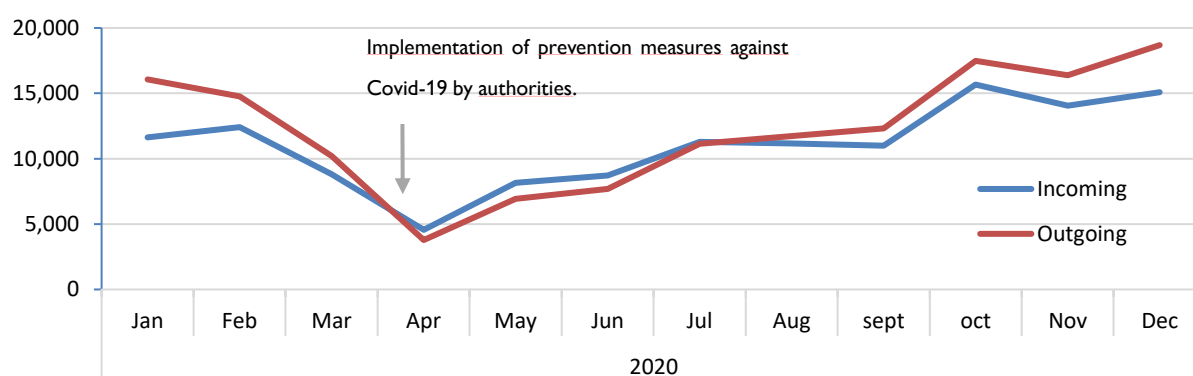
<http://www.fao.org/3/CA0922EN/CA0922EN.pdf>; USAID Office of Food for Peace Food Security Desk Review for Niger, 2017.

<https://www.fantaproject.org/sites/default/files/resources/FFP-Niger-Food-Security-Desk-Review-Oct2017.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and WFP: *Hunger, displacement and migration: a joint innovative approach to assessing needs of migrants in Libya*, 2019. <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000110392/download/>

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit globally, migrants and people on the move have been disproportionately affected by the measures to control the spread of the virus.<sup>5</sup> As movement became restricted, migrants' remittances to families and communities of origin reduced, significantly restricting their contributions to local and global development. On 17 March 2020, two days before Niger registered its first COVID-19 case, the government imposed strict measures to prevent the spread of the virus in the country. According to FMP data, migration flows in 2020 saw a drop in overall movements from and to Niger, with a 48 per cent drop between January and April 2020 (Figure 1). Thus, travel restrictions and increased border controls have made travelling more difficult. The closure of borders in Niger, in addition to similar restrictions adopted by other countries in the ECOWAS region, impacted migration flows with subsequent socio-economic consequences for Niger and other ECOWAS Members States.

Figure 1: Incoming and outgoing flows observed at FMPs



A direct result of socio-economic consequences of the pandemic is the impact on remittances, which are projected to decline globally by USD \$109 billion and USD \$37 billion in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>6</sup> One in nine people globally are affected by remittance flows. Roughly half reside in small towns and rural villages where remittances put food on the table, educate children and support small businesses. Remittances impact the economy and livelihood of citizens in Niger, where the low level of development<sup>7</sup> has increased migration. Due to the near shut down of economic activities and decline of remittances caused by the pandemic, migrant families and households faced increased economic hardships.

### Objectives of the research study

Therefore, following objectives 1 and 20 of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), to “collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies” and “promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants”, IOM Niger conducted this study to understand the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on migration and the well-being of migrant households and communities in Niger, as well as to contribute towards evidence-based policy decisions.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the socio-economic profile of migrant households in selected areas prone to migration.
2. To understand the ways in which migration is linked to the socio-economic well-being of households and communities of selected areas in Niger.
3. To compare remittances sent to Niger in 2019 with those sent after COVID-19 measures were put in place in 2020.

<sup>5</sup> UN: Policy Brief, COVID-19 and People on the Move, June 2020.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank: COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens. Migration and Development Brief, no. 32; Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33634>

<sup>7</sup> Niger is ranked 189 on the Human Development Index; UNDP: Human Development Report 2020: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/NER.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/NER.pdf)

4. To contribute to the ECOWAS Commission and the Government of Niger’s understanding of socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on remittance-receiving households and to inform policy decisions regarding continued remittance flows during the COVID-19 pandemic and the free movement of people.

This report begins with an overview of the methodology employed followed by study findings from the household survey and qualitative interviews. The qualitative study results are integrated with the household survey findings to provide further context and understanding.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a mixed-method approach utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a holistic understanding of the relationship between migration and remittances, and how COVID-19 impacted both remittances and the socio-economic well-being of migrant households and communities in Niger.

### Research questions

Research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What is the profile of migrants and their households?
2. What are the challenges for the free movement of people during the COVID-19 measures, and what did migrants experience due to COVID-19?
3. What are the socio-economic barriers and challenges that migrant households face due to COVID-19?
4. Does migration and the free movement of people contribute to the development of their communities or villages of origin?
5. If so, in which ways do migrants contribute to the development of their communities of origin?
6. What role do migrant remittances play in the socio-economic well-being of households and communities in Niger, and what is the impact of COVID-19 on remittances?
7. How are remittances used by households and how has COVID-19 affected how they are used?
8. What modes or mechanisms of transferring funds are used by migrants to send remittances, and have these changed after the start of COVID-19?
9. Are remittances sent to family members outside of the household, the village or community?
10. What are the main source countries and regions for remittances, and what are the main destinations within Niger?

### Research approach and tools

This study employed a household survey among remittance-receiving households and returned migrants, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) among returned migrants, and semi-structure qualitative interviews with key informants among community leaders, and informal transfer agents.

#### 1. Household survey

The household survey was administered to a total of 329 remittance-receiving households in five regions in Niger – Agadez, Maradi, Niamey, Tahoua, and Zinder. The selection and identification of households were conducted through the following phases:

Phase 1: the first phase of selection involved selecting regions through purposeful sampling using existing IOM data on migration trends and dynamics in Niger. The regions were selected due to their long tradition of migration for returning and departing migrants towards neighbouring countries and ECOWAS countries as well as the areas where migrants return.

Phase 2: the second phase involved selecting departments and communes based on existing IOM data of migrant returnees registered in IOM’s various programmes of assistance.

Phase 3: the third phase involved randomly selecting households in a sampled area selected during phase 2. Criteria employed for administering the survey was that a household must have at least one member of the household as a migrant worker who travelled abroad in the last 12 months prior to the start of data collection. The migrant member of the household could be abroad or have returned from working abroad during the last 12 months prior to the start of data collection.

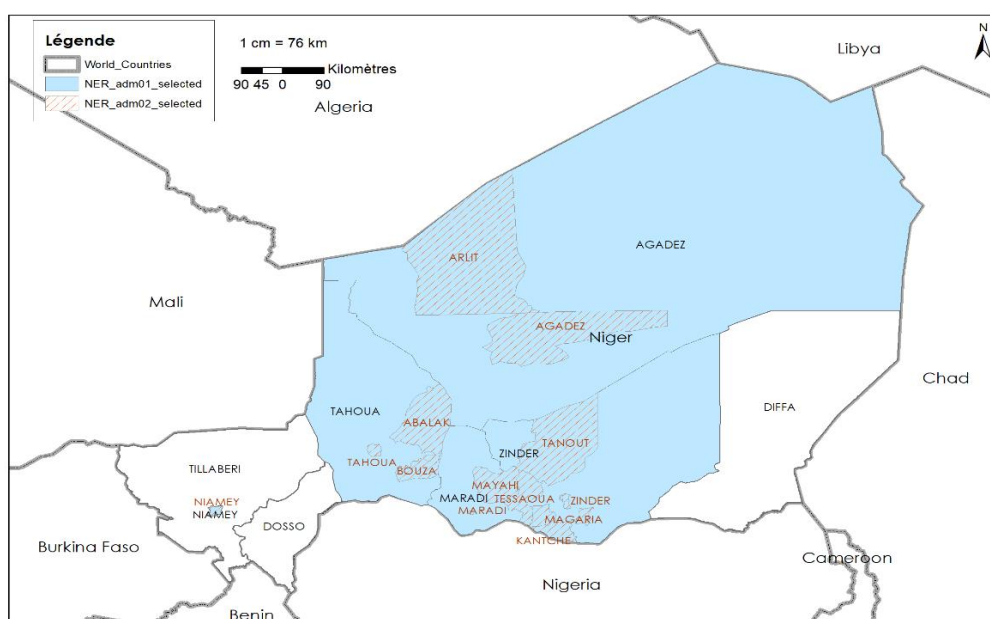
### *Sampling strategy and selection for Household questionnaire*

The final sample consisted of 329 households distributed as follows: 17 per cent of households in Agadez, 20 per cent in Maradi, 20 per cent in Tahoua, 23 per cent in Zinder and 20 per cent for the city of Niamey. In addition, 51 per cent of the interviews were conducted in urban areas against 49 per cent in rural areas for the 329 household members in eight regions, 13 departments and communes.

**Table 1: Selection, survey area, and sampling size**

No	Region	Department	Sample size	Percentage
1	Agadez	Agadez	46	14%
		Arlit	11	3%
2	Maradi	Maradi city	13	4%
		Mayahi	28	8%
		Tessaoua	26	8%
3	Niamey	Niamey	64	20%
4	Tahoua	Tahoua city	22	7%
		Bouza	28	8%
		Abalak	15	5%
5	Zinder	Zinder city	13	4%
		Kantche	17	5%
		Tanout	18	5%
		Magaria	28	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Map 2: Surveyed areas in Niger**





## Household survey modules

The household survey questionnaire includes the following modules:

- Cover and informed consent
- Module 1: Household Identification, roster and demographics
- Module 2: Migrant Profile
- Module 3: Household Revenue and Migrant remittances
- Module 4: Impact of COVID-19

## 2. Key informant interviews

To capture more nuanced findings on how the pandemic impacted migrants, their households, and their communities, a total of 11 key informant interviews were conducted in addition to the household survey. The key informant interviews were divided into two categories:

- **Community-level:** semi-structured interviews were conducted among community leaders in each of the five regions to assess the perception of migration and remittances, and to assess the impact of COVID-19 at the community and village level.
- **Financial service providers for transfer of funds:** Banks and money transfer service providers in the formal and informal sector were interviewed through a semi-structured questionnaire to capture informal transactions, and the change in frequency and level of remittances sent by migrants.

## 3. Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)

To further understand the experience of migrants, six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted among 38 returned migrants in three regions – Niamey, Tahoua and Zinder. In each of the three regions, two FGDs were conducted; one FGD with female returned migrants and one FGD with male returned migrants per region. Although the aim was to have an equal number of female and male participants in each region, it was not possible to identify women in Niamey. The gender compositions of the FGDs is as follows:

Table 2: Gender distribution of FGDs by region

Region	Female participants	Male participants	Total
Niamey	0	5	5
Tahoua	7	9	16
Zinder	8	9	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38</b>

The objective of the FGDS was to obtain a range of information on migrants' perceptions and experiences regarding their migration journeys, the processes and mechanisms of sending remittances to their households before COVID-19, and challenges or obstacles faced by the migrants and their households due to COVID-19 measures.

Returned migrants were identified using multiple methods: 1) snowball method using key informants in the community to identify returned migrants, 2) IOM's Return and Reintegration Programme, and 3) points of entries (PoEs) where migrants are known to pass through.

## 4. Flow Monitoring Data

Data routinely gathered through the Flow Monitoring Registry (FMR) and Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS) was used to provide information on migration flows at key transit points in 2019 and during COVID-19 measures in 2020. FMS

are individual surveys conducted at Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) used to capture migration trends as well as demographic and socioeconomic profiles of migrants transiting through each FMP.

## Operational definitions<sup>8</sup>

1. **Migration:** A process of moving, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants
2. **Migration – Circular:** The process a form of migration in which people repeatedly move back and forth between two or more countries.<sup>9</sup>
3. **Migration – Seasonal:** The process of migration for employment by its character dependent on seasonal conditions and is performed only during part of the year.<sup>10</sup>
4. **Migrant:** A migrant is, as any person, who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay.
5. **Migrant household:** The households of migrants residing in their county and/or communities of origin.
6. **Communities of origin:** The communities that are source of migratory flows.
7. **Remittances:** Personal monetary transfers, cross border or within the same country, made by migrants to individuals or communities with whom the migrant has links. In this study, remittances refer to both formal and informal remittances that are in-kind or cash transferred through formal means as well as outside the formal financial system.
8. **Respondent:** In this study, respondents to the household survey were any adult male or female member of a household aged 18 or over who mainly receives the remittances transferred by the migrant. The respondent may or may not be the head of the household.
9. **Returned migrants:** Migrants who have returned to Niger after a period abroad. In this study, migrants that returned within the 12 months from the date of data collection were included as returned migrants.

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<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, sources are from IOM: International Migration Law: Glossary on Migration, No 34, 2019. IOM: Geneva. Retrieved from: [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Circular Migration and Mobility Partnerships between the European Union and Third Countries (16 May 2007) COM (2007) 248 final, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> UN: International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (adopted 18 December 1990, entered into force 1 July 2003) 2220 UNTS 3, Art. 2(2)(b).

## FINDINGS

This section presents findings from the 329 households surveyed in Niger in 2020. The section begins with an overview of household characteristics and the profile of migrants from the households surveyed, including their destinations and type of work or economic activity abroad. It then presents the role of migration and remittances in the socio-economic well-being of households and communities, how COVID-19 impacted remittance flows and the free movement of people, and the household situation during the pandemic.

### Household Characteristics

#### Socio-demographic characteristics

The majority of respondents (61%) in the household survey are male heads of households. 82 per cent of all respondents could read and write. Additionally, 51 per cent of heads of households hold a primary-level education and only 5 per cent held higher educational level beyond secondary schooling (or *supérieur*). Moreover, 77 per cent of respondents are married and 11 per cent are widowed. The household size varied depending on locality; on average, households in the survey comprised of 4 to 5 individual members, and 36 per cent comprised of six individual household members (table 3).

Table 3: Household socio-demographic characteristics

		Agadez	Maradi	Niamey	Tahoua	Zinder	Total
<b>Gender of Respondents</b>							
	Female	70%	2%	56%	46%	28%	39%
	Male	30%	99%	44%	54%	72%	61%
<b>Age grouping</b>							
	Between 18 and 30	18%	6%	9%	17%	42%	19%
	Between 31 and 40	21%	45%	19%	20%	21%	25%
	Between 41 and 49	21%	31%	16%	19%	5%	18%
	50 years or more	40%	18%	56%	45%	32%	38%
<b>Size of Household</b>							
	Less than 3	3%	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%
	Between 4 and 6	19%	8%	14%	15%	13%	13%
	7 or more	79%	90%	85%	82%	85%	85%
<b>Marital Status</b>							
	Single/unmarried	4%	3%	6%	5%	17%	7%
	Divorced	5%	0%	3%	0%	8%	3%
	Married	67%	94%	67%	85%	72%	77%
	Separated	0%	3%	2%	0%	1%	1%
	Widow/er	25%	0%	22%	11%	1%	11%
<b>Literacy</b>							
	No	37%	10%	22%	19%	8%	18%
	Yes	63%	90%	78%	82%	92%	82%
<b>Level of Education</b>							
	Primary	50%	74%	29%	65%	40%	51%
	Secondary	43%	20%	59%	35%	60%	44%
	Higher education	7%	6%	12%	0%	0%	5%

Table 4 below illustrates the age composition of respondents by region. In general, the age of respondents varied between 18 and 79 years of age. The proportion of individuals interviewed aged 35 represent 83 per cent in Niamey, 78 per cent in Agadez, 77 per cent in Tahoua, 73 per cent in Maradi, and 43 per cent in Zinder. Eight per cent of respondents were less than 26 years old, while the respondents aged 55 and over represent 27 per cent of the total of respondents. In terms of gender distribution, 61 per cent of respondents were male while 39 per cent were female.

Table 4: Age disaggregation of respondents by region

Age	Agadez	Maradi	Niamey	Tahoua	Zinder	Ensemble
18 - 25	7%	0%	3%	8%	21%	8%
26 - 35	21%	27%	14%	15%	36%	23%
36 - 45	28%	45%	19%	29%	11%	26%
46 - 54	19%	21%	17%	9%	12%	16%
55 - 60	12%	8%	23%	14%	7%	13%
61 or more	12%	0%	23%	25%	15%	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Household composition

The number of people in the households surveyed varies and the average for all households is 9 people. The highest number is 26 people while the lowest is only one person per household. The regions of Niamey, Zinder and Maradi have an average of 9 people per household while Agadez and Tahoua have 8 people.

Table 5 below provides an overview of the number of people aged over 65 in the households interviewed. A little less than half of households (42%) have family members aged over 65 residing in the household. The number of family members over 65 per household varied depending on the household; a maximum of 3 people aged over 65 were identified in 139 households.

Most households (92%) have at least one family member under the age of 15, with some households having up to 15 children under the age of 15. In the Zinder region, a quarter of the households (25%) have the highest number children under age 15. The regions of Niamey and Agadez have the fewest children under age 15 in households. Moreover, households with the largest number of children are found the region of Zinder compared to other regions, and households with the least number of children are found in the region of Niamey. On average, households in this study have four family members under the age of 15.

Table 5: Age of household members

Age	Observation	Percent	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Households with members aged > 65	139	42%	1	3	1.24
Households with members aged < 15	302	92%	1	15	4.16

### Household sources of income and revenue

In examining the sources of household income, findings show that on average households surveyed have 1 to 6 people in their households who work, 39 per cent of households had at least one person working (table 6). In looking across the five regions surveyed, of households who did not have at least one person engaged in paid work, the majority of households reside in Zinder (74%); half reside in Niamey (50%), 32 per cent in Agadez, 20 per cent in Tahoua, and 15 per cent in Maradi.

Looking at the characteristics of the households, we can observe that 57 per cent of the sampled households have members who have part-time work; the number of people with part-time work varies between 1 and 7 people depending on the household. Results of the survey show that the proportion of people with part-time work is respectively higher in Zinder, Agadez, Maradi compared to Niamey and Tahoua.

Table 6: Employment type in households

Employment Type	Observation	Percent	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Households with at least one person working	129	39%	1	6	1.63
Households with at least one person with a paid part-time work	186	57%	1	7	1.41

As shown in table 7 below, the majority of households (82%) indicated having at least one family member currently working abroad, while 38 per cent of households have between 1 to 3 migrant family members returned from abroad (table 7).

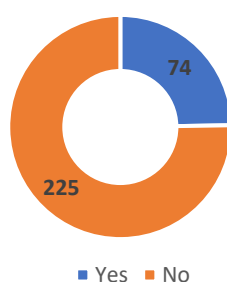
Table 7: The number and percentage of households with migrant member

Migrant	Observation	Percent	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Households with migrant member returning from abroad	121	38%	1	3	1.12
Households with migrant member currently working abroad	270	82%	1	4	1.34

### Household owning habitation and arable land

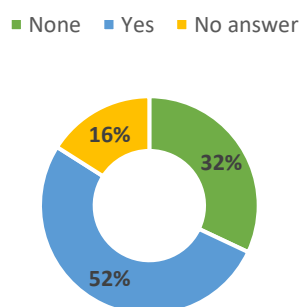
The survey revealed that 75 per cent of households own the house in which they lived. This is one less burden for households compared to the cost of renting their homes.

Figure 4: Proportion of households owning their house



As illustrated below in figure 5, approximately half of the households surveyed (52%) owned cultivable land during the survey. This shows that half of households cultivate for household consumption and for selling. As nearly half of the sampled households (49%) are located in rural areas, this finding is not surprising and explains the availability of land for half of the households.

Figure 5: Proportion of households with arable land



## Main sources of household revenue

Of the sample studied, 10% of households were not able to indicate their annual income. Among those who did, the average annual household income, including income in kind, was 154,478 XOF. The highest annual income is 3,600,000 XOF and the lowest is only 20,000 XOF.

Table 8 illustrates household revenue by region. The 3 main sources of household income came from trade (41%), agriculture and livestock (23%) and other sources such as gold panning, artisanal work, ironwork, etc (14%). Only a few households reported having migrant remittances as a source of income. In addition, 9 per cent of households reported having family businesses that produce services as their source of income. Among the households surveyed, 8% in Agadez and 4 per cent in Zinder indicated that they had no source of income. Trade is the most important source in four of the five regions while in Maradi sources from Agriculture are the most important. We also note that some households have several sources of income.

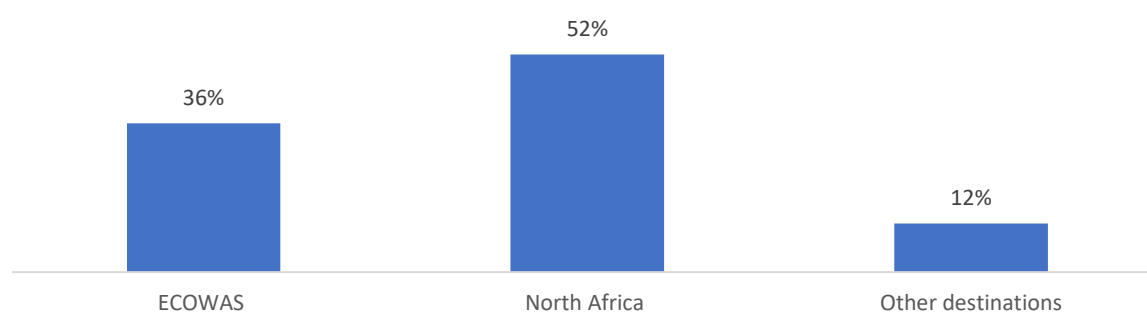
Table 8: Source of revenue by household and by region

	Source of Revenue	Agadez	Maradi	Niamey	Tahoua	Zinder	Percentage
1	Commerce	45%	37%	38%	30%	57%	41%
2	Agriculture livestock	10%	41%	11%	30%	17%	23%
3	Monthly salary	8%	5%	18%	19%	2%	10%
4	Business	19%	4%	9%	6%	6%	9%
5	No source of income	8%	0%	2%	1%	4%	3%
6	Other sources	10%	13%	22%	14%	14%	14%

## Migrant Profile

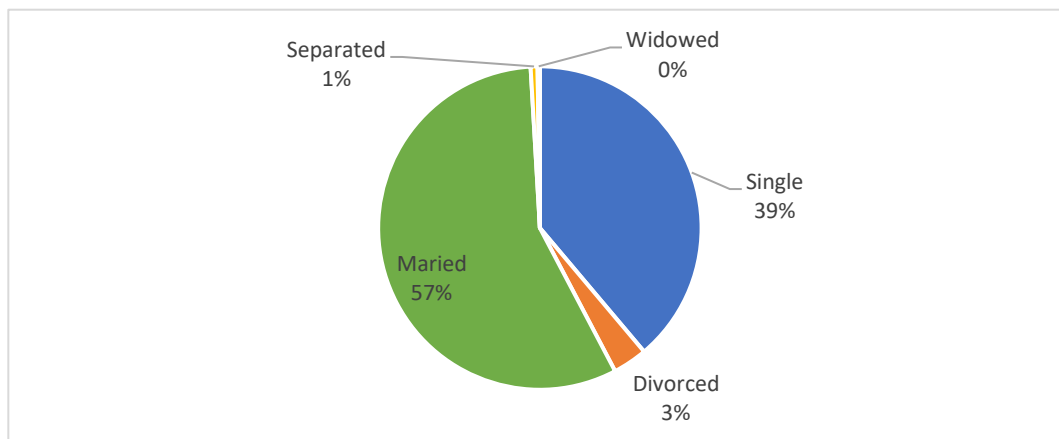
Of those surveyed, 435 former migrants who returned to their households in Niger at the time of this survey responded to the migrant profile module administered to 329 households. The three main countries of return of Nigerien migrants interviewed were from Libya (40%) followed by Nigeria (24%) and Algeria (12%). This data is in line with the findings of IOM's migration flow monitoring tool, which lists these three countries as the main countries of destination for Nigerien migrants. As shown in figure 6, 36 per cent of Nigerien migrants returned from countries in the ECOWAS region, mainly Nigeria and Ivory Coast. In addition, migrants indicated preference for certain destinations such as Cameroon, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. Libya was the country most cited by migrant women.

Figure 6: Destination of migrants



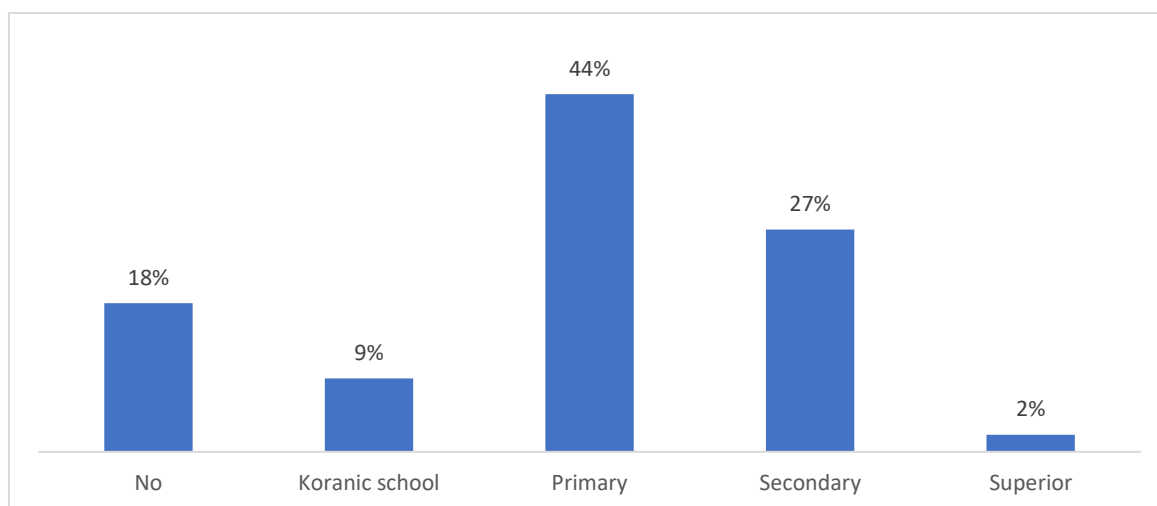
Most of the migrants were men (96%), with women accounting for only 4 per cent of the total. The average age is slightly higher than 32 years. This shows the young age of migrants as well as the predominance of men among travellers. In addition, slightly over half of the surveyed migrants (57%) were married and 39% reported being single.

Figure 7: Distribution of migrant civil status



Of the 435 migrants surveyed in the five regions, 118, or 29 per cent, said they had not received any formal education in their country of origin. The educational attainment of migrants who indicated having received an education reached secondary level in one in three cases. Only 2 per cent of the migrants in the survey indicated that they had obtained a higher-level education, and almost half had a primary school level. However, 9 per cent of migrants indicated having a Koranic education (figure 8).

Figure 8: Level of educational of migrants

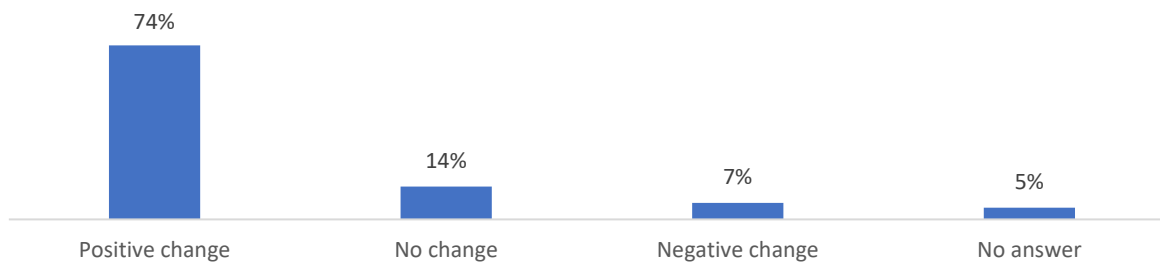


### Role of migration in the socio-economic well-being of households and communities

Migration plays an important role in the socio-economic well-being of households and communities in Niger. Circular or seasonal migration provides the means to improve economic conditions of families and communities that often could not have sustained themselves during failed agricultural productions and food insecurity.

When respondents were asked in the survey if migration of their family member brought about a negative or positive change to their households, 74 per cent of respondents said it brought a positive change, only 7 per cent perceived the migration of their family member as negative, while 14 per cent perceive migration of their family as not bringing any change.

Figure 9: Household perception of migration



Analysis of the focus group discussion among returned migrants and interviews with community leaders align with the results from the household survey; the majority perceived migration as bringing a positive change to their households.

As described by returned migrants who participated in the FGDs, the main role of migration was to supplement household income, acquire funds for construction projects (building or repairing a home, etc), accumulate funds to acquire means of transportation such as a motorcycle, or start a small business or economic activity at home that would sustain the household. The main reasons for migrating cited in all three FGDs was the necessity to improve living conditions of households experiencing food shortages due to failed or weak agricultural production. Participants in Tahoua and Zinder stated the lack of employment or economic activity at home as one of the primary reasons for migrating abroad.

The group discussions among returned migrants in the Department of Kantché in Zinder cited extreme poverty, repetitive failed harvests throughout the last few years, and chronic food insecurity in the households and the community at large.

Although the FGDs did not have 50/50 gender balance across all three regions, analysis revealed an interesting insight into the reasons women and men migrate. Whilst all returned migrants cited the same overall reasons described above, women from Tahoua stated marriage to a migrant as the primary reason for their migration abroad. In Zinder, women returned from abroad stated the inability of the men to meet the basic needs of their households, particularly the inability to pay for children’s schooling, whether due to lack of paid work or lack of products to sell due to bad crops. Moreover, returned migrant women in Zinder were inspired to migrate by seeing the accomplishments of other migrants who had previously migrated.

Similarly, interviews conducted among community leaders in the five regions describe migration as often the only solution for households to meet their essential needs and improve living conditions. Migration has been described as the only way to provide overall economic well-being of households and a means to combat poverty. Lack of employment and economic opportunities along with daily needs such as food, healthcare, and the education of children were cited as the primary reasons why people migrate to other countries. A community leader in a rural agricultural-based community in Zinder described the impact of migration:

*“Considering the conditions in which we live with our families here in the community, it is a very great advantage and evolution for us. Although we face many problems and injustice abroad, it is really a great help”*

Rural communities that rely primarily on agricultural production for economic activity and household consumption are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Thus, migration to neighbouring countries, even if only seasonally, allows people to send remittances to their families struggling to feed themselves, pay for children’s schooling and healthcare costs, build homes with better materials, purchase land for cultivation, and contribute to the creation of small business enterprises and jobs.



Findings from the household survey revealed that out of 329 respondents, 74 per cent stated that their socio-economic well-being of their households positively changed due to remittances sent by their migrant family member abroad (figure 10 below).

Figure 10: Household perception of change due to remittances

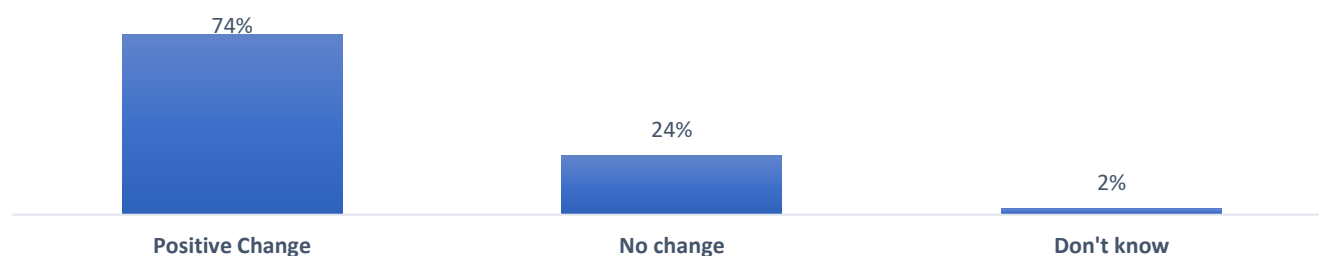


Table 9 below illustrates the ways in which migrant remittances improved the socio-economic well-being of migrant households. When asked in what way remittances have positively impacted their household, respondents stated that remittances contributed to the improvement of food quality and nutrition (29%), better healthcare including medication and hospitalization (19%), better overall socio-economic well-being (19%), improved social status within the community (10%), better or improved social status (5%), and the ability to start a new income generating activity (3%).

Table 9: Areas of improvement for households due to remittances

	Distribution of changes	Percentage
1	Food consumption	29%
2	Healthcare	19%
3	Overall socio-economic well-being	19%
4	Social status	10%
5	Housing	5%
6	New income generating activity	3%

Specifically looking at how remittances are used by migrant households, table 10 below illustrates to what extent spending for daily needs takes up the largest share of migrant remittances sent home(55%). Other main usages of remittances are on healthcare (10%), including the purchase of medication and hospitalizations for household members, and education for children of migrant families (7%).

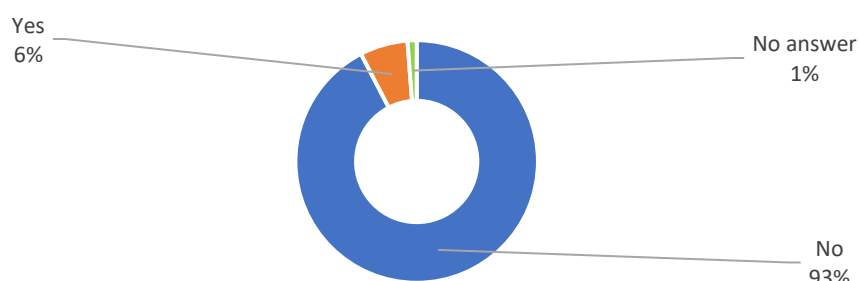
Even if the amount of remittances sent is not very large, the interviewed remittance receiving households use 3% to save for unforeseen circumstances, 2% towards a small business or income generating activities, and 1% towards debt generally contracted with neighbouring households or in small businesses.

Table 10: Household remittance usage

	Distribution of expenses	Percentage
1	Expenses for daily needs	55%
2	Healthcare (medication, hospitalization, etc.)	10%
3	Education	7%
4	Savings	3%
5	Business / income generating activities	2%
6	Production tools (agriculture, clothing, etc.)	2%
7	Investment in livestock or agriculture	1%
8	Debt	1%
9	Rent for housing	1%
10	Land purchase	1%
11	Household items (fridge, TV, etc.)	1%
12	Other (i.e. religious and family celebrations)	17%

Figure 11 illustrates that only 6 per cent of households set up a business with remittances sent by migrants. This result is not surprising as only 2 per cent of the remittances received constituted investment for businesses or income-generating activities, and only 1 per cent for savings. The businesses created are in most cases small-scale income generating activities selling basic necessities.

Figure 11: Small business created with migrant remittances



Migrant remittances sent home as well as the money brought back by returned migrants, help families, and in turn their communities, to create small businesses and economic activities that generate needed jobs within in the community. As a respondent from Tahoua describes, the ability for people to migrate for work and their remittances have made concrete changes within the community:

*“Yes, of course...you will see large workshops for woodwork, metalwork, and carpentry. Others return with skills of masonry. Today we have people employing 30 to 40 people after creating these workshops”*

While several returned migrants sent funds for communal ceremonies such as celebrations of new births, marriages and weddings, the majority regularly send remittances to contribute directly to their home communities in the construction and rehabilitation of community wells, mosques, schools, community health centres and as well as sending funds for the purchase of medicine supplied at the health centres.

## Socio-economic impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the socio-economic well-being of Nigerien communities and their households. Directly linked to socio-economic well-being, the movement of people and migrant remittances have been particularly affected since the start of the pandemic.

### Impact of COVID-19 on remittance flows

Findings from the household survey, FGDs, interviews among money transfer agents and community level reveal the impact of COVID-19 measures on migrant remittances. As described in detail below, the frequency, amount, and method of sending remittances have been impacted by the pandemic.

#### Frequency of remittances

Migrants sent remittances to their households in regular frequencies prior to the COVID- 19 pandemic, often several times a year. The majority of migrants (88%) sent between 1 and 5 times a year, while others sent at a higher frequency; 11 per cent of migrants sent between 6 and 10 times a year, and 6 per cent sent more than 10 times a year as shown in table 11 below.

Table 11: Frequency of remittances

	Transfers per year	Frequency	Percentage
1	1-5 times	288	82%
2	6-10 times	40	11%
3	> 10 times	22	6%

However, since the onset of COVID-19, the frequency of remittances sent to households have reduced. Findings from the household survey reveal that 77 per cent of households stated that the frequency and flow of remittances have decreased since mid-March (after COVID-19 measures), 18 per cent stated that the frequency of transfers did not change, while 5 per cent of households surveyed stated that the frequency in which they received remittances increased since the onset of COVID-19 measures.

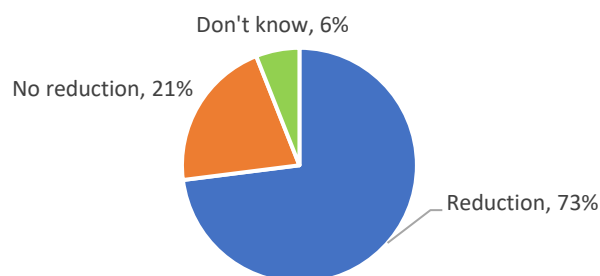
Returned migrants who participated in FGDs in Niamey, Tahoua, and Zinder all described a drastic reduction in the frequency of remittances sent to their communities of origin. Prior to COVID-19, participants sent remittances with regular frequency from once a week, twice a month, to once every six months. However, with the onset of the pandemic, migrants sent remittances in irregular frequency due to reduction or loss of paid work, long months of restriction on mobility or quarantine, and the disruption of informal money transfer channels.

### Amounts of remittances

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, the amount of remittances sent to households varied by region; some migrants sent a very large sum of money, totalling 2,500,000 XOF per year, while others sent 7,500 XOF per year, according to the heads of households interviewed. The average annual amount of remittances sent by migrants was 65,854 XOF. However, since mid-March 2020 when COVID-19 measures were put in place, the amount of remittances drastically reduced for the majority of households (73%), and 14 per cent of households indicated not receiving any remittances from migrant family member.

Figure 12 illustrates that out of the 329 households surveyed in this study, 73 per cent saw a reduction in the amount of remittances because of the pandemic, while 21 per cent did not see a reduction and 6 per cent responded as don't know.

Figure 12: Change in amount of remittances sent during COVID-19



Analysis of the FGDs and interviews with money transfer agents also reveals similar drastic reduction in the amount of remittances migrants were able to send after the onset of the pandemic and the strict measures to suppress the spread of COVID-19. For the majority of FGD participants, sending remittances to their households at home became rare during the pandemic, while others were unable to send any amount due to loss of paid work.

*“Before [COVID-19], I regularly sent 7,000 CFA every week. But with [COVID-19], I could not even send 1,000 CFA”* [FGD participant, Niamey]

### Method of sending remittances

The most used method of sending remittances by migrants to their households is via informal agents (42%), as they apply relatively low transfer costs compared to conventional money transfer agencies in the formal sector. Other mechanisms of sending remittances include a network of friends and acquaintances with ties to country of origin. This mode of transfer is also very fast. Table 12 shows to what extent conventional transfer agencies in the formal sector are used compared to that of informal methods of sending remittances. Banks and transfer agencies in the formal sector are the least used mechanisms for sending remittances to migrant households (3% and 15% respectively), while informal means of transferring remittances are most often used by migrants (83%). Money

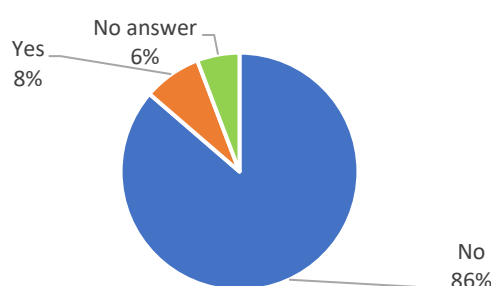
transfer agencies and service providers charge rates that often discourage senders who typically send small amounts of money at a time.

Table 12: Method of sending remittances

	Mechanism	Percent
1	Informal transfers	42%
2	Friends and connections	36%
3	Transfer agency	15%
4	Parent / families	5%
5	Banks	3%

As figure 13 illustrates, only 8 per cent of households observed a change in the method of sending remittances since the start of COVID-19, while 86 per cent did not observe major changes.

Figure 13: Change in sending remittances observed by households



### Countries from where remittances originate

Depending on the region, the main source countries for Nigerien migrant remittances are Algeria, Libya, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, and to a lesser extent, United Arab Emirates. Table 13 depicts the main three sending countries for each region identified through interviews with money transfer agents in the informal sector. Specifically, the majority of remittances sent to households in Agadez originate from Algeria, followed by Libya, and the United Arab Emirates. The main sending country for remittances destined to Niamey is Ghana, followed by Ivory Coast and Togo. Households in Maradi receive the majority of their remittances from Libya, followed by Nigeria. Remittances sent to households in Tahoua are sent most often from Ivory Coast, followed by Libya and Cameroon. For Zinder, the top remittance sending country is Nigeria, followed by Algeria and Libya.

The information received from the informal money transfer agents corresponds in large part with DTM FMP data IOM Niger collects. Migrants who originate from Agadez most frequently migrate to Libya and Algeria; migrants from Tahoua most frequently migrate to Algeria, Libya, Ivory Coast, those from Maradi most frequently migrate to Libya and Nigeria; those from Niamey migrate to Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, and to some extent Nigeria; and migrants from Zinder most often migrate to Libya, Algeria, and Nigeria. Table 13 illustrates the main source countries of remittances by region with the most coming from countries shaded in orange.

Table 13: Main remittance sending countries

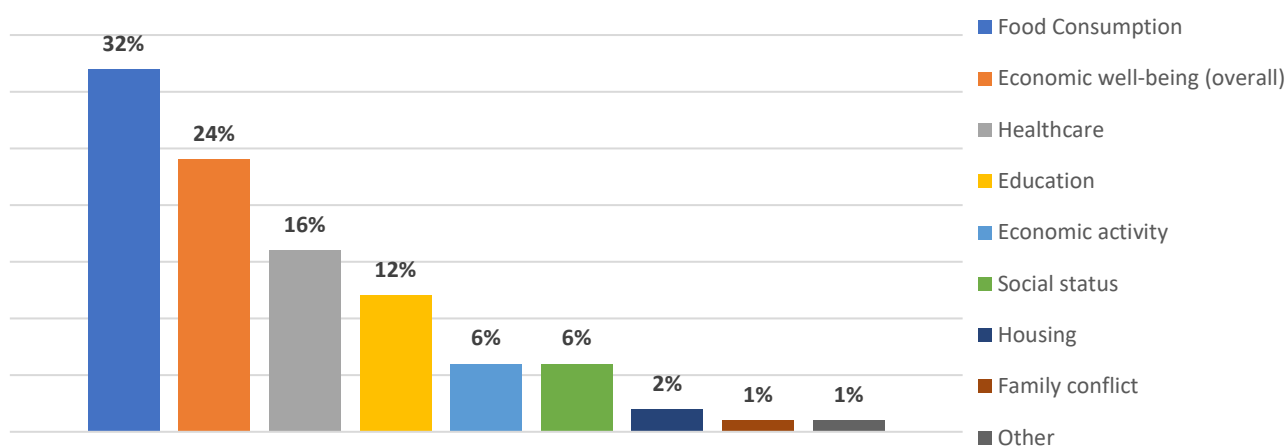
	Agadez	Niamey	Maradi	Tahoua	Zinder
<b>Libya</b>					
<b>Algeria</b>					
<b>Nigeria</b>					
<b>Ivory Coast</b>					
<b>Cameroon</b>					
<b>Ghana</b>					
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>					
<b>Togo</b>					

## Household socio-economic situation during COVID-19

COVID-19 and the restrictive measures against the spread of the virus have had a significant impact on the socio-economic situation of households and communities in Niger. Over half of households surveyed (59%) experienced a change in their well-being during COVID-19 measures, while 35 per cent of households saw no change due to COVID-19 measures. Out of the those who experienced a change due to COVID-19, nearly all the households surveyed (99%) experienced a negative impact since the onset of the pandemic.

The top three areas respondents identified as negatively changing or impacting their households due to COVID-19 are: a reduction of household food spending and consumption, including quantity and quality of food (32%); overall economic well-being (24%); and healthcare (16%) including medication and hospitalization (figure 14).

Figure 14: Impact of COVID-19 on households



## Conclusion - Challenges to the free movement of people

In Niger, migration is linked to a historical pattern of seasonal and circular migration to (mainly) neighbouring countries. In recent years, challenges to livelihoods, poverty and food insecurity further compounded by conflict as well as environmental degradation and desertification of communities have been the drivers of labour migration to Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, and other countries in West Africa.

Findings of this study illustrate that migrants from Niger overwhelmingly migrate for the main purpose of providing additional funds to their households to meet basic needs and increase the overall socio-economic condition of their families. One third of households indicated that migrant remittances sent home contributed positively to the well-being of their households and why circular migration within the region continued to present day. Returned migrants interviewed similarly perceived labour migration to neighbouring countries as necessary to assist in household food shortages, improve overall living conditions of households, and generate income for small businesses in their communities of origin.

As in other studies on migration and remittances<sup>11</sup>, the direct benefits of migrant remittances reach beyond migrant households. Interviews with community leaders, returned migrants, and informal transfer agents revealed that migrant remittances directly contribute the development of communities of origin.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent prevention measures, have brought these benefits to a halt, directly affecting not only migrants, but also their households, families and their communities at home. Several challenges were identified in this study that show the direct impact of COVID-19 pandemic on migrant remittances, the free movement of people and the well-being of households in Niger. The biggest challenges faced by Nigerien migrants during this period are the restrictions on movement to and from Niger as well as within the countries they reside and work. For many, this resulted in loss of jobs or reduced work, which directly affected remittance flows – both in reduced frequency and amount of remittances sent as prior to the onset of COVID-19.

Over one third of the households surveyed in this study indicated substantial reduction in the frequency and amount of migrant remittances received, and less than a quarter of households received nothing at all between Mid-March and the time of data collection. Nearly all households surveyed experienced a negative impact on the overall well-being of their households since mid-March. As a result of decreased remittances, households had no choice but to reduce spending on basic needs such as food, healthcare and education, or had to re-distribute the meagre remittances they received across daily expenditures, reducing the amount and quality of many essentials, including quantity and quality of food.

Thus, understanding how migration impacts communities in Niger and the ways in which the pandemic impacted migrants, their households and communities of origin sheds light on how IOM and its partners can better respond to the needs of migrants and communities of origin.

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<sup>11</sup> Sisenghath, S. Migrant worker remittances and their impact on local economic development, 2009; ILO: Promoting informed policy dialogue on migration, remittance and development in Nepal, 2016.

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