

MIGRATION TRENDS FROM, TO AND WITHIN THE NIGER

2016 – 2019



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FOREWORD

A country at the crossroads. This term, frequently used to describe the Republic of the Niger, a vast, mainly desert State located between West, Central, East and North Africa, exemplifies the country's role in bringing together people, goods, and ideas.

Migration and the Niger are intrinsically linked to one another. For centuries, nomadic populations have travelled through the Niger to let their cattle graze and search for fertile grounds. Due to its geographic location, the Niger—twice the size of France—is a major country of origin, transit and destination for hundreds of thousands of migrants each year.

With the increase in the number of migrants passing through the Niger since 2014, IOM has strengthened its capacity to collect, analyse and disseminate quantitative and qualitative data on migratory flows. Some of this data, collected between 2016 and 2019, is presented in the report, highlighting the key migratory trends in the Niger in the last four years. Using different methodologies of data collection, a picture is painted of who migrates, where to, and what the reasons are behind their decision to migrate.

Looking back and analysing the migration trends of the last four years, clear patterns can be observed in migration movements from, to and within the Niger. These insights can hopefully assist policy makers in the Government of the Niger and other key partners to develop evidence-based policies and programmes that promote safe and regular migration and reduce the risks and negative impacts of irregular migration.

On behalf of the Government of the Niger and the International Organization for Migration, we hope you will find this report useful and we look forward to your feedback.

Soly Amadou

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink.

Permanent Secretary of
the Migration Working Group

Barbara Rijks

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink.

Chief of Mission
IOM Niger

ACRONYMS

AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
DGPC	Direction General de la Protection Civile (General Directorate of Civil Protection)
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FMP	Flow Monitoring Point
FMR	Flow Monitoring Registry
FMS	Flow Monitoring Survey
HRO	Humanitarian Rescue Operation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MARS	Migrant Assistance Registration System
MiMOSA	Migrant Management Operational Systems Application
NFI	Non-food item
SAR	Search and rescue
VHR	Voluntary Humanitarian Return

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KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

Between 2016 and 2019, IOM Niger:



Registered **1,055,214 migrants** travelling from (55%), to (29%) and within (16%) the Niger, most of them Nigerien migrants.



Observed a significant decline in migration flows after the implementation of Law 2015-36, adopted by the Government of the Niger in May 2015, which criminalizes irregular migration, with migrants preferring to travel to Algeria instead of to Libya.



Assisted **27,153** (mainly non-Nigerien) **migrants** through its Humanitarian Rescue Operations after being returned from Algeria, and assisted **41,781 Nigerien migrants** after arriving in Agadez through official convoys from Algeria.



Rescued **1,739 stranded migrants** through its Search and Rescue operations in close collaboration with the General Directorate of Civil Protection in the Agadez region.



Assisted **49,752 migrants** in its six transit centres in Arlit, Agadez, Dirkou and Niamey.



Supported **42,604 migrants** with assisted voluntary return from the Niger to their country of origin. In 2019, IOM Niger recorded the highest number of migrants assisted with voluntary return of all IOM missions worldwide: **16,378 migrants**.

INTRODUCTION

The Niger, located in the southern band of the Sahara desert, is a country at the heart of intraregional and cross-regional trade, cultural exchanges and human mobility flows. The city of Agadez, in the north of the country, was once the farthest outpost of the Ottoman Empire and has remained an important regional hub ever since for trade and, in recent decades, for migrants travelling north towards Libya and Algeria.

Since 2011, following the crises in Mali and Libya, the number of migrants transiting through the Niger has increased and smuggling networks proliferated. On 26 May 2015, the Nigerien parliament adopted law N° 2015-36, which criminalizes the illicit smuggling of migrants (hereinafter: Law 2015-36).¹ The implementation of this law started in earnest in September 2016 when foreign migrants travelling north of Agadez, most often *en route* to Libya, were intercepted by the Nigerien authorities. Some smugglers were arrested and hundreds of vehicles of migrant smugglers were confiscated by the Nigerien police. This is reflected in data collected by IOM Niger in this period: while IOM registered 325,642 (mostly foreign) migrants travelling to Libya between April and September 2016, only 37,755 migrants were registered between September and December 2016, the majority of whom were Nigeriens.²

In this report, IOM Niger provides an overview of the migration flows in the Niger between 2016 and 2019, a period during which flows changed significantly. It explains how different events and developments have affected migration patterns in the country, and seeks to present a broad picture of migration from, to and within the Niger showing the complexity, multi-dimensionality, and dynamics of human mobility.

The figures presented in this report are based on data collected through a variety of methodologies, including: **Flow Monitoring**, set up in February 2016 to better capture overland migration flows in the Niger; records from the **Humanitarian Rescue Operations and Search and Rescue Operations** which directly assist migrants in distress; **official convoys returning Nigerien migrants from Algeria**; registered foreign migrants at the six **IOM transit centres**; and migrants assisted with voluntary return to and from the Niger. Secondary sources are used to provide contextual

analysis of migratory trends and other significant events in the Niger. The data presented in this report does not capture, nor does it aim to capture, the overall numbers of migrant stock in Niger. This data is collected and published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.³

The report is divided in four sections. The first section will explain the sources and methodology used in this research. The second section will examine the history of migration in the Niger and the recent events that affected migration patterns between 2016 and 2019. The third part will present the main migration trends and patterns in the Niger as captured through various data sources, focusing on a quantitative analysis. The fourth and last part of the report will analyse the profiles of the migrants registered by IOM at the flow monitoring points, those assisted in the transit centres, those registered at the official convoys and of the migrants assisted with voluntary humanitarian returns and assisted voluntary returns to the Niger.



¹ Government of the Niger. *Loi 2015-36 Relative au Trafic Illicite de Migrants*. Hereinafter: Law 2015-36.

² The Flow Monitoring Point (FMP) in Séguédine (northern Niger near the border with Libya) registered 298,277 outgoing migrants in 2016. The majority of those were registered in Q1-Q3.

³ UNDESA International Migrant Stock Country Profile for Niger, 2019: www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/countryprofiles.asp

SECTION I: SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The data and information presented in this report are drawn from the following sources:

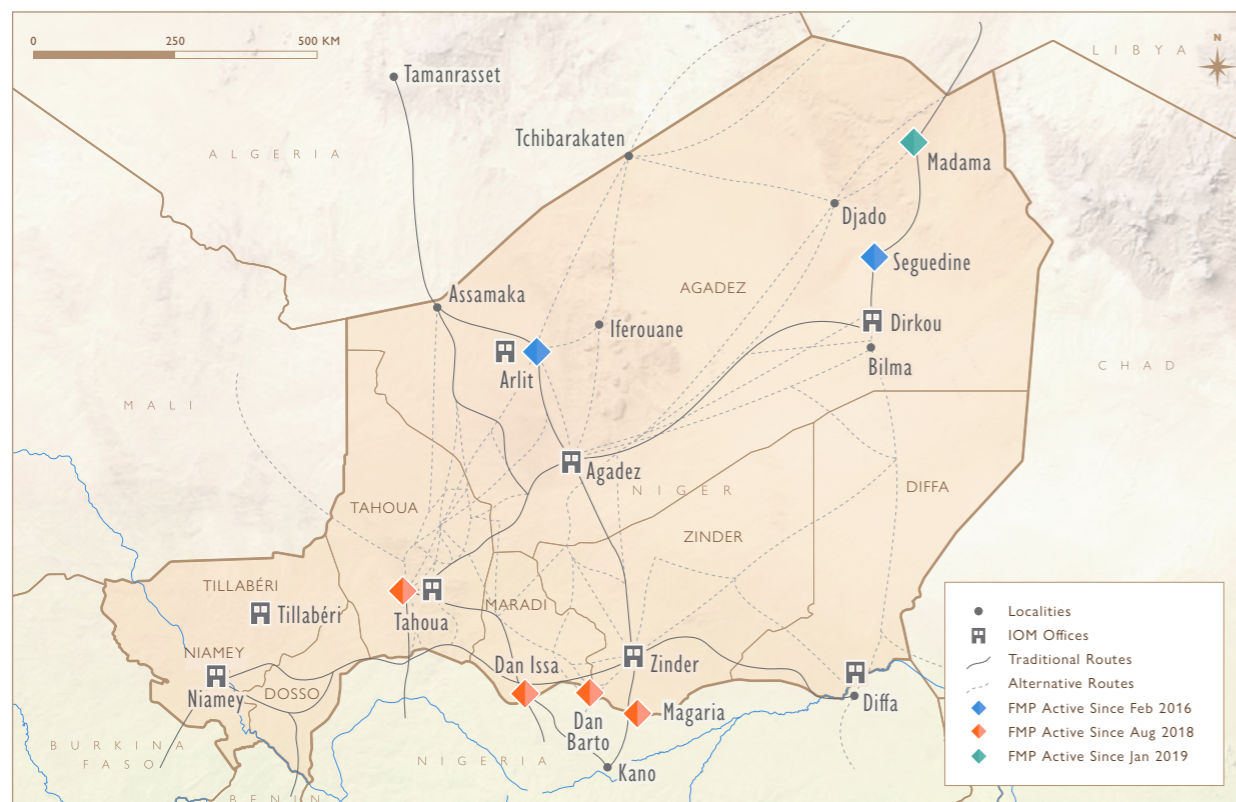
FLOW MONITORING POINTS

Flow monitoring is a component of IOM's global Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), a system to track displacement and population mobility.⁴ In the Niger, it is used to capture overland migration flows at key points of transit, or Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs), which are identified in collaboration with the Nigerien authorities. Two types of data collection methodologies are used at each FMP:

1. Flow Monitoring Registry (FMR): IOM enumerators collect quantitative data on the number of migrants and basic demographic information at FMPs using a mixed-method approach of direct observation and semi-structured interviews with migrants and key informants (such as personnel at bus stations, police or customs officials, and bus or truck drivers). Data is collected at the group level using a standardized questionnaire to understand the estimated number of migrants disaggregated by sex, age, nationality,

as well as their area of departure and destination. FMR data has been collected daily since February 2016 at the FMPs in Arlit (key transit point to Algeria) and Séguédine (key transit point to Libya). Five additional FMPs were added in August 2018 in the towns of Tahoua, Maradi, Magaria, Zinder and Madama. However, to ensure consistency throughout this report, only data from FMPs in Arlit and Séguédine is analysed in this report. In addition, the data collected in 2016 and 2017 was limited to the number of migrants observed, their sex and nationality. Starting in 2018, additional data was collected on age, vulnerability, reason for migration, city and country of departure, and intended destination for outgoing and incoming migrants. Since 2018, data was also captured on flows within the Niger. As a result, more detailed information is available for 2018 and 2019 than the previous years. The data on migration flows from and to the Niger will therefore be analysed for Seguedine and Arlit only.

Map 1: Flow Monitoring Points in the Niger



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.

⁴ Source: www.globaldtm.info/global.

2. Flow Monitoring Survey (FMS): This method is used to collect qualitative data from randomly selected samples of migrants to provide additional information on their socioeconomic profile. Since July 2018, FMS data has been collected daily by randomly sampling a minimum of 10 migrants per day in each FMP location.

Limitations: The FMP data represents only a portion of the migration flows as captured through the FMPs along the axes of Agadez–Arlit–Assamaka (border with Algeria) and Séguédine (border with Libya) and vice versa. The spatial and temporal coverage of the flow monitoring methodology is limited to the period of data collection and therefore there is no data available outside the covered time slots. Also, especially after the implementation of Law 2015-36, migrants are known to travel along new, alternative routes, circumventing traditional axes of migration and thereby the FMPs.

HUMANITARIAN RESCUE OPERATIONS IN ASSAMAKA

In September 2017, the Government of Algeria intensified its operations to return (mainly) West African migrants from Algeria to the border with the Niger (“Point Zero”) about twelve kilometres from Assamaka, the nearest border town in the Niger. According to the Government of Algeria, these migrants have illegally entered Algeria from the Niger and are therefore expelled back to the Niger. IOM organizes Humanitarian Rescue Operations (HROs) in and close to Assamaka where the rescued migrants receive basic assistance at the reception site, including shelter, food and water, as well as information about IOM's available support through the assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programme. Migrants are subsequently transported to IOM's Transit Centre in Arlit, a five-hour bus drive from Assamaka.

Limitations: IOM collects basic data on the migrants that arrive, but not all migrants cross from Algeria into the Niger at Assamaka. In addition, not all migrants that arrive in Assamaka accept the assistance offered by IOM. A small percentage of migrants decide to continue their migratory journey and prefer to go their own way. Therefore, the data collected on the migrants assisted by IOM in Assamaka is not the same as the total number of foreign migrants who have returned from Algeria.

SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN THE AGADEZ REGION

Since October 2016, IOM, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior's General Directorate of Civil Protection, undertakes search and rescue (SAR) operations to find migrants in distress and bring them to the nearest town (Agadez, Arlit or Dirkou) in the Agadez region. Upon rescue, migrants are provided with water, food and basic non-food items (NFI) assistance. They subsequently receive information on safe and regular migration, as well as the services offered by IOM such as AVRR, should they wish to return to their country of origin. SAR operations are performed both pro-actively and reactively in the areas around the cities of Agadez, Arlit, Dirkou and Bilma. For proactive missions, SAR teams are dispatched along pre-defined routes based on continuously updated maps of migration routes to search for migrants in distress. Reactive missions are conducted in response to calls or information received from various sources including traders, migrants, and local authorities alerting IOM of migrants in distress.

Limitations: Due to increased law enforcement, smugglers and migrants will take alternative routes, circumventing the main roads. Therefore, the number of migrants rescued by IOM and partners in these remote, desert areas is not indicative of the total number of migrants in distress or passing through the Agadez region.

OFFICIAL CONVOYS FROM ALGERIA

After the death of 92 Nigerien migrants at the border between the Niger and Algeria in 2013, the Governments of the Niger and Algeria intensified their collaboration and started regular repatriations of Nigerien migrants over land from Algeria to the Niger in 2014, also referred to as official convoys.⁵ IOM provides technical and humanitarian support to the Government of the Niger in a dedicated repatriation site in Agadez where the migrants are received. IOM supports with the registration of the migrants, which includes basic demographic data, including their area of origin, sex, and age. IOM also provides some basic NFI kits for the migrants, which are distributed by the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

Limitations: The number of repatriated Nigerien migrants registered by IOM is not indicative of the total number of Nigeriens returning from Algeria to the Niger. In addition, as no biometric information is collected, it is possible that the same people are registered more than once.

⁵ Le Monde.fr. 2013. *Les Cadavres De 92 Migrants Retrouvés Dans Le Désert Au Niger*. Available at: www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/10/30/87-cadavres-de-migrants-nigeriens-retrouves-dans-le-desert-pres-de-l-algerie_3505703_3212.html.

REGISTRATION OF MIGRANTS IN IOM'S TRANSIT CENTRES

IOM provides direct assistance to migrants in three transit centres in the Agadez region (Arlit, Agadez, and Dirkou) and three centres in Niamey. The migrants that opt to participate in the AVRR programme stay in the transit centre while their return to their country of origin is prepared. Basic demographic data is collected for all migrants upon arrival at the centre, while additional in-depth information, such as reasons for migration, level of education, knowledge about the migration journey prior to migrating and conditions of their stay and employment in the destination country, are collected from some migrants on a voluntary basis. The average stay of migrants is between two to three weeks, but this can vary based on each migrant's individual profile and needs: 70 per cent of the migrants in the transit centres do not have

travel documents, which prolongs the time they stay in the transit centres while IOM works with the consular services in the Niger (if available) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the country of origin to arrange a *laissez-passer*. Moreover, migrants with specific medical needs, unaccompanied migrant children, or other migrants who need special individual care usually stay in the transit centres for a longer period.

Limitations: Detailed data on migrant profiles is limited to the number of migrants choosing to participate in the in-depth questionnaire. Due to the increasing number of migrants staying at the centres over time, IOM staff was not able to conduct many interviews, which led to a decline in the response rate between 2016 and 2019.



IOM Community Mobilizers during a Search and Rescue operation. © 2019/IOM Niger

ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Migrants who wish to return to their country of origin through IOM's AVRR programme are registered through IOM's institutional system for tracking IOM's support to migrants: the Migrant Management Operational Systems Application (MiMOSA).

IOM Niger registers foreign migrants stranded in the Niger returning to their countries of origin as well as Nigerien

migrants returning through the voluntary humanitarian return (VHR) programme and AVRR from various countries.⁶

Limitations: The number of migrants assisted with AVRR and VHR should not be taken as the total number of Nigeriens returning to the Niger, as Nigerien migrants, especially from Libya and Algeria, often find their own way back to their country.

⁶ International Organization for Migration. 2019. *IOM Organizes First Humanitarian Charter Flight From Algeria To Niger*. Available at: www.iom.int/news/iom-organizes-first-humanitarian-charter-flight-algeria-niger.

SECTION II: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MIGRATION IN THE NIGER

THE NIGER, A HISTORIC CROSSROADS

The Sahel has always been home to a variety of nomadic populations. The Niger, located at the intersection of key trans-Saharan roads and a natural link between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, has been an important commercial centre since the time of the Songhai Empire, which dominated the Sahel in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The city of Agadez in particular, the last large town before crossing the desert towards Algeria and Libya and located in the middle of the country, has always played a key role in the trans-Saharan trade.⁷

Historically, migration flows in West Africa are mainly intraregional, a trend that intensified following the adoption of the Free Movement Protocol between the fifteen countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1979. This made it possible to move freely from different West African countries to the Niger.

With the increasing oil production in Algeria and Libya in the early 2000s, migration routes started to shift towards more northbound routes, with the Niger being a major transit country for migration of West African nationals.

In a context of political instability and economic crises in the region, migration routes to North Africa and Europe through the Niger have gained in importance during the 1990s and 2000s. The ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol and the Niger's relative stability, as opposed to some of its neighbouring countries, contributed to increased numbers of migrants transiting through the country.

Although the number of migrants going to Europe grew towards the end of the 20th century, migration flows on the African continent and in the West Africa region specifically, continued to be much more significant.

Several key events affected migration routes and flows in the Niger between 2010–2019:

1. Instability in Libya

After the start of the Libyan crisis in 2011, the security situation deteriorated dramatically in Libya, which shares a long border with the Niger. Declining security and the absence of central state power and governance in Libya have, on the one hand, led to less border controls, which allowed migrants to cross the border into more easily. On the other hand, it led to the proliferation of armed groups, as well as networks of smugglers along the Central Mediterranean Route.⁸

number of migrants crossing from the Niger into Libya and Algeria, the growing number of smuggling networks, and the heightened risks and dangers faced by migrants. Foreign migrants found travelling north of Agadez were subject to increased scrutiny and arrests, and smugglers were arrested, and their vehicles apprehended.⁹ The law also led to increased controls at borders between the Niger and neighbouring countries.¹⁰ After the law started to be enforced, the number of checks by law enforcement actors along the migration routes have significantly increased.

2. Adoption of 2015 Law Criminalizing Irregular Migration in the Niger

The most significant factor affecting migration flows in the Niger in recent years is the adoption of Law 2015-36 against the unlawful smuggling of migrants (*Loi N° 2015-36 relative au trafic illicite de migrants*) passed by the Government of the Niger on 26 May 2015. This law, which criminalizes irregular migration, was passed in response to the increase in the

The adoption of the law has had other significant consequences. Following its adoption, many migrants got stuck in transit towns along migration routes, often with few resources and with little options. This contributed to the development of "ghettos" in towns such as Agadez and Arlit, where vulnerable migrants are exposed to more risks, including exploitation and human trafficking. In addition, the decrease of economic opportunities for local communities

⁷ Green, T., 2019. *A Fistful Of Shells: West Africa From The Slave Trade To The Age Of Revolution*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁸ The Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) is one of the most active migration routes from sub-Saharan Africa via North Africa and Europe, mainly Libya, Tunisia and Algeria, to Italy.

⁹ Tubiana, J., Warin, C. and Saeneen, G., 2018. *Multilateral Damage: The Impact Of EU Migration Policies On Central Saharan Routes*. The Hague: Clingendael: Netherlands Institute for International Relations. Available at: www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/multilateral-damage.

¹⁰ Brachet, J., 2018. *Au Sahara, Voyager Devient Un Crime*. Le Monde.fr. Available at: www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/06/01/au-sahara-voyager-devient-un-crime_5308325_3212.html.

which followed the decrease in the number of migrants passing through these towns also fed the development of criminal groups and growing tensions between migrants and host communities. Furthermore, the law led to significant changes in smuggling networks in the Niger: new actors emerged to help migrants reach Algeria or Libya started to use bypass routes to evade increased controls by the defence and security forces, exposing migrants to increased risks and dangers. As these roads pass through isolated and perilous areas through the desert, it is difficult to track them and the number of people using these unofficial routes is therefore unknown.¹¹

3. Discovery and Closure of Gold and Oil Sites

The discovery of gold in Djado, a town in north-eastern Niger along the border with Algeria and Libya, in April 2014 led to a gold rush drawing in thousands of prospective gold miners, mainly from Chad and Sudan.¹² Security concerns led to increased controls and in early 2017, the Nigerien Government closed the gold sites in Djado.¹³ Following the closure of Djado, the gold seekers retreated to Tchibarakaten, where a remote mining site, which is run predominantly by Nigeriens, is located on the Algerian border. This site is harder to reach and find, particularly by foreigners unfamiliar with the desert terrain, exposing them to higher risks.¹⁴ Moreover, attacks by armed groups and growing insecurity has led to the fewer migrants travelling towards the oil extraction sites in the Diffa and Zinder regions.^{15, 16}

4. Working and Living Conditions in Libya

Insecurity, increased violence and the absence of the rule of law after the collapse of the Libyan State led to precarious living and working conditions for migrants, who often ended up in detention centres where terrible abuses have been reported.¹⁷ The deteriorating conditions for migrants in Libya have precipitated increased movements of migrants to Algeria in pursuit of economic opportunities. Data collected by the FMPs on the route to Algeria show an increase of Nigeriens going to Algeria: from 5,000 Nigeriens in 2016 to 44,000 Nigeriens in 2019.

5. Enforcement of Migration Laws in Algeria

Algeria's Law No. 08-11 of 2008 governs the conditions of entry, stay and circulation of foreign nationals on its territory.¹⁸ The law treats irregular migration as a criminal offense punishable by up to two years in prison and establishes procedures for migrants' expulsion from the country.¹⁹ Towards the end of 2017, in an effort to enforce this law, governmental authorities in Algeria intensified the collective expulsions of thousands of migrants to the border with the Niger, mainly from countries in the West and Central Africa region.

11 Molenaar, F., Ursu, A., Tinni, B., Hoffman, A. and Meester, J., 2017. *A Line In The Sand: Roadmap For Sustainable Migration Management In Agadez*. [online] The Hague: Clingendael: Netherlands Institute for International Relations. Available at: www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Roadmap_for_sustainable_migration_management_Agadez.pdf.

12 Pellerin, M., 2017. *Beyond The 'Wild West': Gold Rush In Northern Niger*. Security Assessment in Northern Africa. Geneva: Small Arms Survey. Available at: www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Niger-Gold.pdf.

13 Le Figaro.fr. 2017. *Niger: Fermeture De Sites Aurifères Dans L'ouest*. Available at: www.lefigaro.fr/flash-eco/2017/07/18/97002-20170718FILWWW00185-niger-fermeture-de-sites-auriferes-dans-l-ouest.php.

14 International Crisis Group, 2020. *Managing Trafficking In Northern Niger*. Africa Report. Brussels. Available at: www.d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/285-managing-trafficking-in-niger.pdf.

15 Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides, Le Gouvernement de la France, 2018. *Situation Sécuritaire Dans Le Delta Du Niger*. Paris: OFPRA. Available at: www.ofpra.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/1805_nga_situation_securitaire_delta_du_niger.pdf.

16 Auge, B., 2018. *L'exploration et la Production Pétrolière En Afrique depuis 2014: Évolution des Acteurs et de leurs Stratégies*. Notes de l'IFRI. [online] Paris: IFRI, OCP Policy Center. Available at: www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/auge_exploration_production_petroliere_afrique_2018_v3.pdf.

17 United Nations Support Mission in Libya and United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2018. *Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in Libya*. Available at: www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/LibyaMigrationReport.pdf.

18 Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne. 2018. *Démocratique et Populaire: Conventions et accords internationaux – lois et décrets arrêtés, décisions, avis, communications et annonces*. Available at: www.joradp.dz/JO2000/2008/036/F_Pag.htm.

19 Amnesty International. 2018. *Forced to Leave: Stories of Injustice against migrants in Algeria*. London. Available at: www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2895122018ENGLISH.PDF.

SECTION III: MIGRATION TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN THE NIGER (2016–2019)

3.1. OVERLAND MIGRATION TRENDS AND PATTERNS TO, FROM AND WITHIN THE NIGER

Traditionally, two important migration routes run across the Niger. The first one links the city of Kano in northern Nigeria, to Tahoua and Agadez. It is used mainly by Nigerians, Ivorians and Cameroonians intending to reach Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria or Libya. The other route, used by migrants from various countries to the west of the Niger, mainly Guinean, Senegalese, Malian and Burkinabe migrants, reach Niamey by bus before continuing their journey north. Agadez is the last city before reaching the borders with Libya and Algeria that is within the ECOWAS Free Movement area and easily reachable by bus and is therefore an important migration hub. Migration flows to North Africa split in the town of Agadez with migrants going to Libya taking the route to Dirkou and Séguédine, while the ones going to Algeria take the route through Arlit and Assamaka.

Since the implementation of the law criminalizing the smuggling of migrants in 2016, migration routes in the Niger have evolved considerably. A multitude of informal bypass routes have emerged in response to increased patrols as well as the growing risks posed by armed bandits on the main migration axes in the north. Some of the informal routes bypass the city of Agadez altogether and avoid the main axes connecting Agadez to Libya and Algeria. These new routes often pass through extremely arid and dangerous desert areas, where there are only a few wells or water points.²⁰



Migrants receiving information about IOM assistance after arriving in Assamaka. © 2019/IOM Niger

20 Tubiana, J., C. Warin, and G. Saeneen, 2018. *Multilateral Damage: The Impact Of EU Migration Policies On Central Saharan Routes*. The Hague: Clingendael: Netherlands Institute for International Relations. Available at: www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/multilateral-damage.

Consequences of Shifting Migration Routes

Migrants are sometimes abandoned by their smugglers in the remote areas of the desert. This leaves migrants in dire situations, with little means and often very limited drinking water available. The temperatures in these areas can reach up to 50 degrees Celsius, making the situation even more challenging. IOM sets out to rescue these stranded migrants through its search and rescue (SAR) operations. The stranded migrants who are assisted through SAR operations are often found in poor health, injured and dehydrated. 2017–19 statistics from the Niger's General Directorate of Civil Protection (French acronym: DGPC) showed that migrants suffered from trauma, respiratory diseases, digestive disorders and malaria, among others.²¹ Communities along the traditional migration routes have also been affected by the change in migration routes as economic opportunities have decreased due to the lower number of migrants transiting.²²

Trends and Numbers

IOM Niger began capturing overland migration flows through its flow monitoring in February 2016. The two Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) in Arlit and Séguédine were first established to capture the migration flows along the two main routes in the Niger: to and from Algeria and Libya. Since then, IOM has established other FMPs along the migratory routes, but to ensure consistency in the data analysis for the period between 2016 and 2019, only the information from the FMPs in Arlit and Séguédine is used in this report.

Between 2016 and 2019, IOM observed a total of 1,055,214 persons travelling from (55 per cent), to (29 per cent), and within (16 per cent) the Niger at the Arlit and Séguédine FMPs, 75 per cent of whom are Nigerien. As a result of the aforementioned Law 2015-36 and the subsequent rise in patrols along migratory routes north of Agadez, a sharp decrease of 79 per cent was observed in outgoing flows between 2016 and 2017, most visibly in Séguédine where the number of outgoing migrants dropped from almost 300,000 in 2016 to just over 35,000 in 2017.



SÉGUÉDINE FMP (FROM/TO LIBYA)

The Séguédine FMP registered a total of 630,312 migrants between 2016 and 2019. The flows from and to Libya were most significantly affected by the implementation of the Law 2015-36. Non-Nigerien migrants without valid travel documents who were found north of the city of Agadez, were considered on their way to illegally enter Libya or Algeria and thus intercepted by law enforcement agencies.

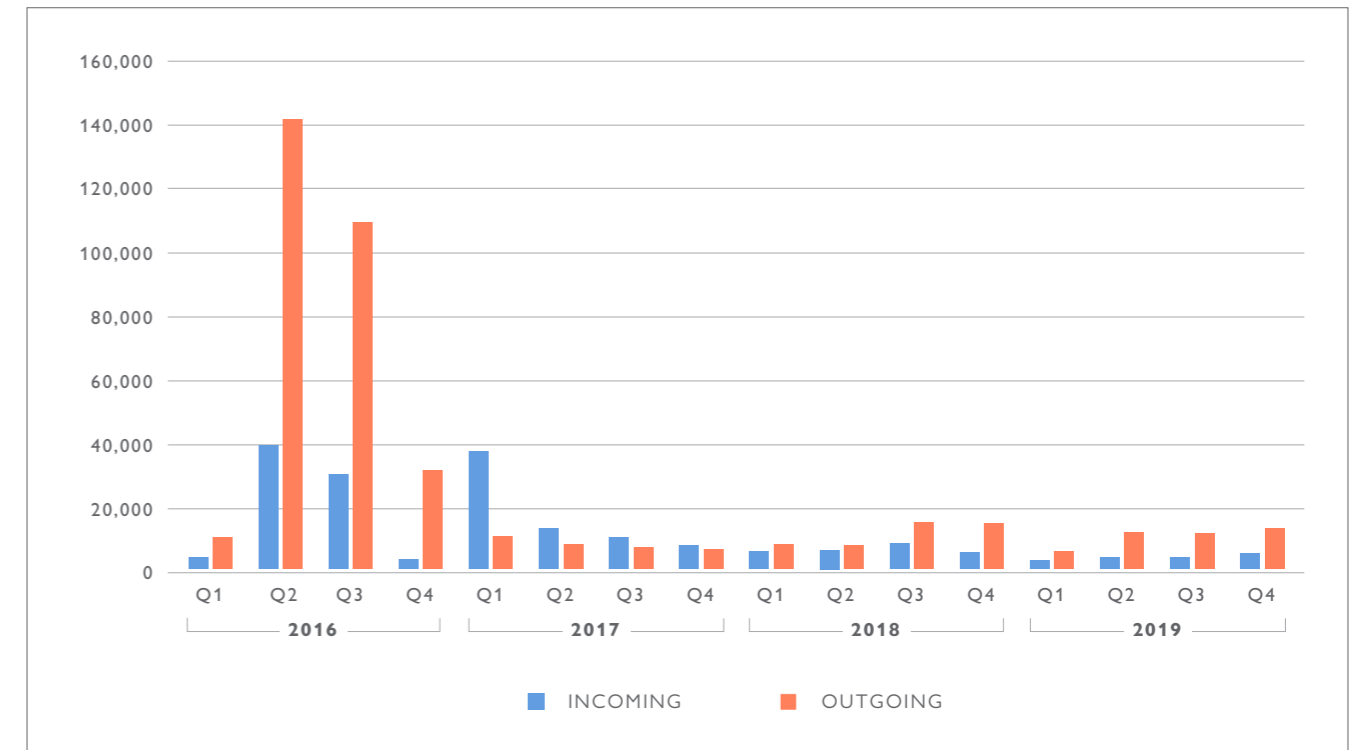
As a result, there was a sharp decrease of the number of outgoing migrants en route to Libya after 2016 (see Graph 1).

In 2016, 65 per cent of all registered migrants in Séguédine were of non-Nigerien origin. In 2017, this percentage fell to 7 per cent. When looking at the absolute numbers, the decrease becomes even more apparent: between January and September 2016, slightly more than 230,000 foreign migrants were registered on their way to Libya. In all of 2017, only 1,400 foreign migrants were observed in the same direction. However, as mentioned, it is important to note that migrants started to use alternative routes, bypassing police controls and thus also IOM's FMPs out of fear of being detected, and that the actual numbers of migrants trying to reach Libya may therefore be higher.

²¹ Direction Generale de la Protection Civile. 2019. *Bilan des activités de recherche et sauvetage des migrants dans le désert par la Protection Civile: de juillet 2017 à octobre 2019*. Niamey.

²² Molenaar, F., A. Ursu, B. Tinni, A. Hoffman, and J. Meester, 2017. *A Line In The Sand: Roadmap For Sustainable Migration Management In Agadez*. [online] The Hague: Clingendael: Netherlands Institute for International Relations. Available at: www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Roadmap_for_sustainable_migration_management_Agadez.pdf.

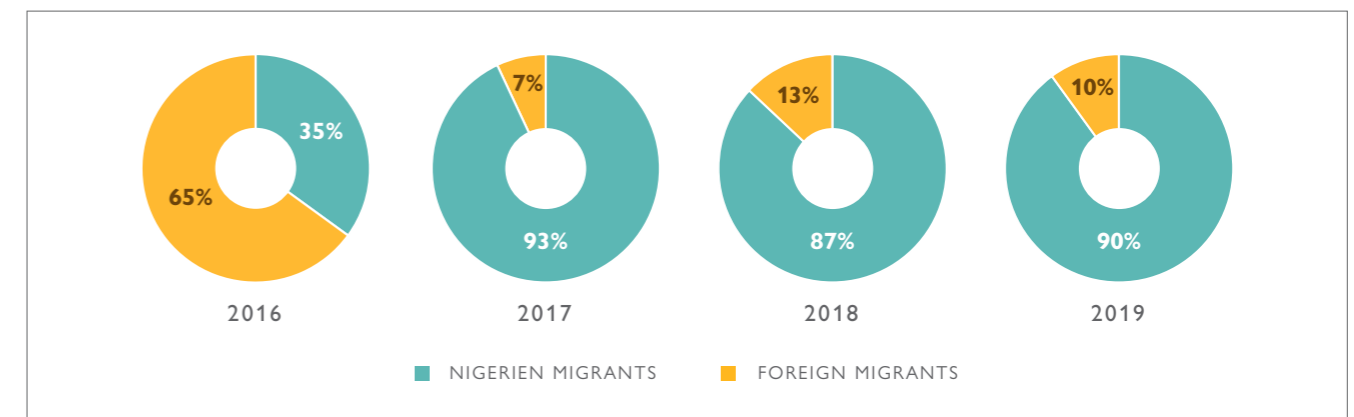
Graph 1: Number of incoming and outgoing migrants registered by FMP in Séguédine (2016–2019)



The number of Nigeriens migrating to and from Libya as observed at the Séguédine FMP almost halved between 2016 and 2019: 131,731 in 2016 to 64,000 Nigerien migrants registered in 2019. This may be attributed to the growing levels of insecurity in Libya and the decrease in economic opportunities. The pattern of Nigeriens migrating through Séguédine nevertheless shows well-established circular migratory patterns between the Niger and Libya related to trade and seasonal work. Most of the Nigeriens migrating to Libya come from the region of Tahoua and travel to Libya for economic opportunities. Section 4.1 contains more details on the profiles of the migrants travelling to Libya.

However, as mentioned, it is important to note that migrants started to use alternative routes, bypassing police controls and thus also IOM's FMPs out of fear of being detected, and that the actual numbers of migrants trying to reach Libya may therefore be higher. In 2016, 65 per cent of all registered migrants in Séguédine were of non-Nigerien origin. In 2017, this percentage fell to 7 per cent. When looking at the absolute numbers, the decrease becomes even more apparent: between January and September 2016, slightly more than 230,000 foreign migrants were registered on their way to Libya. In all of 2017, only 1,400 foreign migrants were observed in the same direction.

Graph 2: Percentage of Nigeriens and foreign migrants observed at Séguédine FMP (2016–2019)

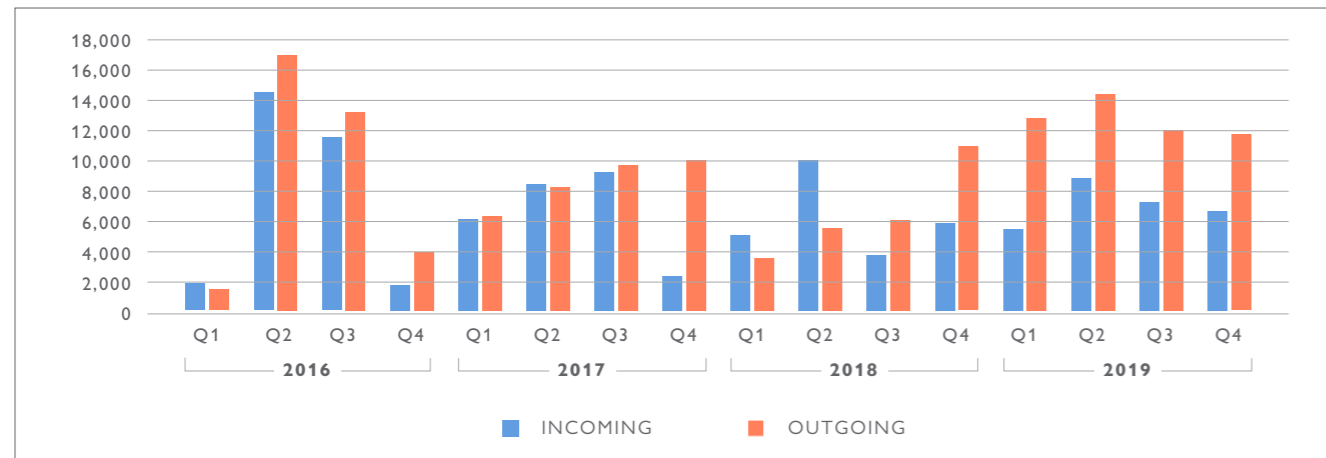


ARLIT FMP (FROM/TO ALGERIA)

Between 2016 and 2019, the FMP in Arlit registered 256,147 migrants transiting through Arlit. Of these, 147,347 (57,5 per cent) were observed on their way to Algeria while 108,800 migrants crossed the border coming back from Algeria.²³ This number excludes the migrants returning from Algeria through the humanitarian rescue operations (covered in section 3.3) and the official convoys (covered in section 3.5) The

lowest number of transiting migrants was registered in 2018 (51,002 migrants) and the highest number was observed in 2019 (79,385 migrants). As was the case in Séguédine, Arlit saw the highest number of outgoing migrants in the second quarter of 2016, right before the implementation of the law started (around 17,000 migrants).

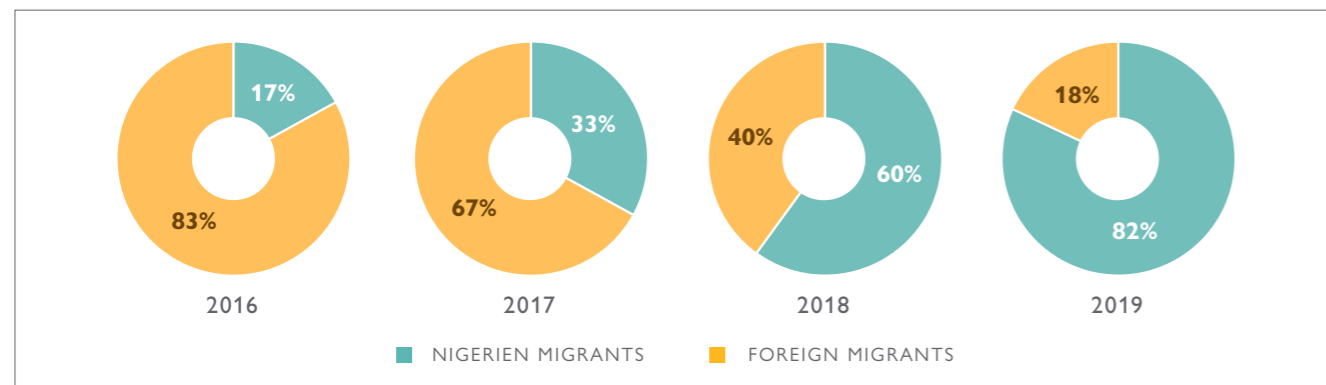
Graph 3: Number of incoming and outgoing migrants registered by Arlit FMP (2016–2019)



Between 2016 and 2019, 49,5 per cent of the migrants registered at Arlit FMP were Nigerien migrants and 50,5 per cent were foreign migrants. The ratio of Nigeriens to foreign migrants reversed over this period: in 2016, 17 per cent of the migrants registered in Arlit were Nigerien and 83 per cent foreign migrants, while in 2019 82 per cent of the migrants registered were Nigerien and 18 per cent were foreign migrants in 2019.

The decrease in foreign migrants is further noticed if we look at absolute numbers: more than 25,000 foreign migrants were observed in Arlit FMP in 2016 and only around 7,000 foreign migrants in 2019. The number increased from around 11,000 Nigerien migrants in 2016 to more than 65,000 Nigerien migrants in 2019, with the increase most prominently in outgoing flows. This indicates that more Nigerien migrants decided to travel to Algeria to pursue economic opportunities after 2016 (as 99% of all migrants in Arlit stated this as their reason to migrate.²⁴

Graph 4: Percentage of Nigeriens and foreign migrants observed at Arlit FMP (2016–2019)



²³ Please note that the FMP in Arlit only captures voluntary overland border crossings of migrants in both directions. The FMP does not capture the migrants who are expelled or repatriated by the Government of Algeria to the Niger through the border town of Assamaka.

²⁴ This information only applies to 2018 and 2019. FMS data collection started in 2018. Same applies to the following paragraphs.

COMPARING ARLIT AND SÉGUÉDINE FMP

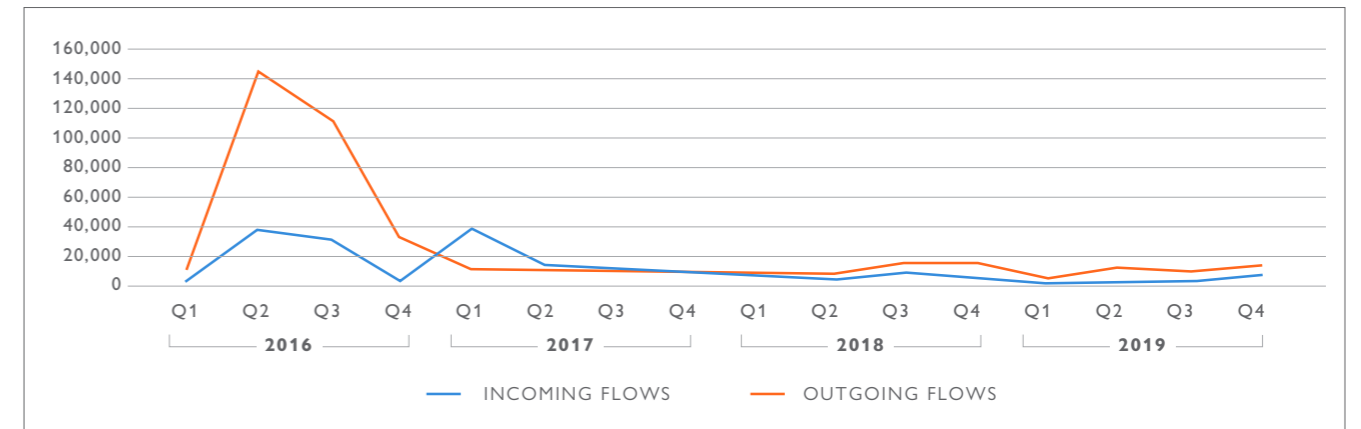
Most of the 1,055,214 migrants that are registered at both FMPs are from the Niger (75% of all registered migrants between 2016–2019). 49,5 per cent of the migrants in Arlit

were Nigerien. In comparison, in Séguédine, while in 2016 43 per cent of all migrants were non-Nigerien, between 2018 and 2019, this percentage fell to 10 per cent of all migration flows.

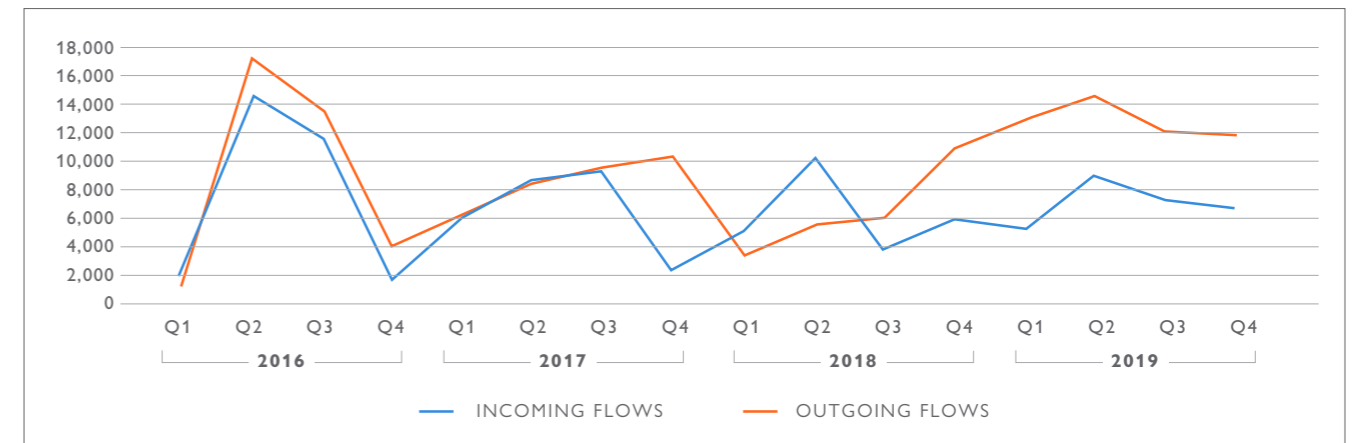
Table 1: Migration flows at Arlit and Séguédine FMP (excluding internal flows, 2016–2019)

YEAR	ARLIT			SÉGUÉDINE			GRAND TOTAL
	Incoming	Outgoing	Total	Incoming	Outgoing	Total	
2016	29,613	35,614	65,227 (15%)	81,617	298,277	379,894 (85%)	445,121
2017	26,134	34,399	60,533 (36%)	72,172	35,031	107,203 (64%)	167,736
2018	24,801	26,201	51,002 (39%)	28,290	50,136	78,426 (61%)	129,428
2019	28,172	51,133	79,285 (53%)	21,252	50,425	71,677 (47%)	150,962

Graph 5: Migration flows in Séguédine (2016–2019)



Graph 6: Migration flows in Arlit (2016–2019)



Looking at these two border crossing points it is clear that the implementation of Law 2015-36 and the deteriorating situation in Libya had a more substantial impact on

migration flows towards Libya than to Algeria and led to a significant decrease in the number of foreign migrants transiting through the Niger.

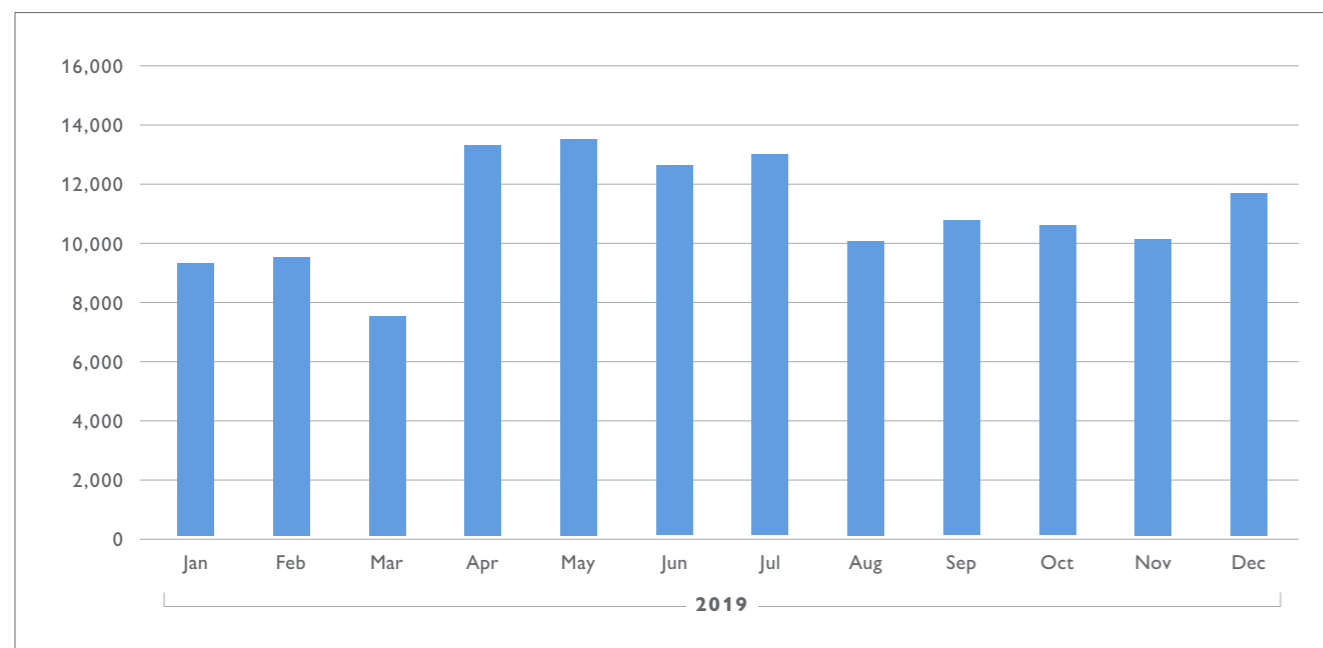
3.2. THE NIGER AS A COUNTRY OF DESTINATION

The Niger is also a destination country for people looking for economic opportunities. Economic zones of interest, such as gold mines, attract both Nigeriens and migrants from other West and Central African countries. Migration flows within the Niger have been captured by FMPs since the last quarter of 2018. In 2019, IOM registered 131,892 migrants that stated the Niger as their final destination. Among the foreign migrants, most were Chadians (11 per cent), Nigerians (7 per cent) and Sudanese (6 per cent).

Migration flows registered by FMPs are considered “internal” if the cities of departure and destination are both within

the Niger. The Nigerien migrants mentioned in section 3.1 are reportedly travelling to and from Libya and Algeria. A small group of Nigerien migrants (105,146) reported to be travelling to other destinations in the Niger in 2019, 80 per cent of whom were registered at the Arlit FMP and reported Arlit and Tchibarakatan, both important mining towns, as destination. The average of this group is 8,762 migrants per month, with highs from April to July and lows in the early months of the year. The peak coincides with the dry season (April–July), when the roads are in better conditions in these months as opposed to the rainy season (August–November).

Graph 7: Internal migration flows in the Niger (2019)



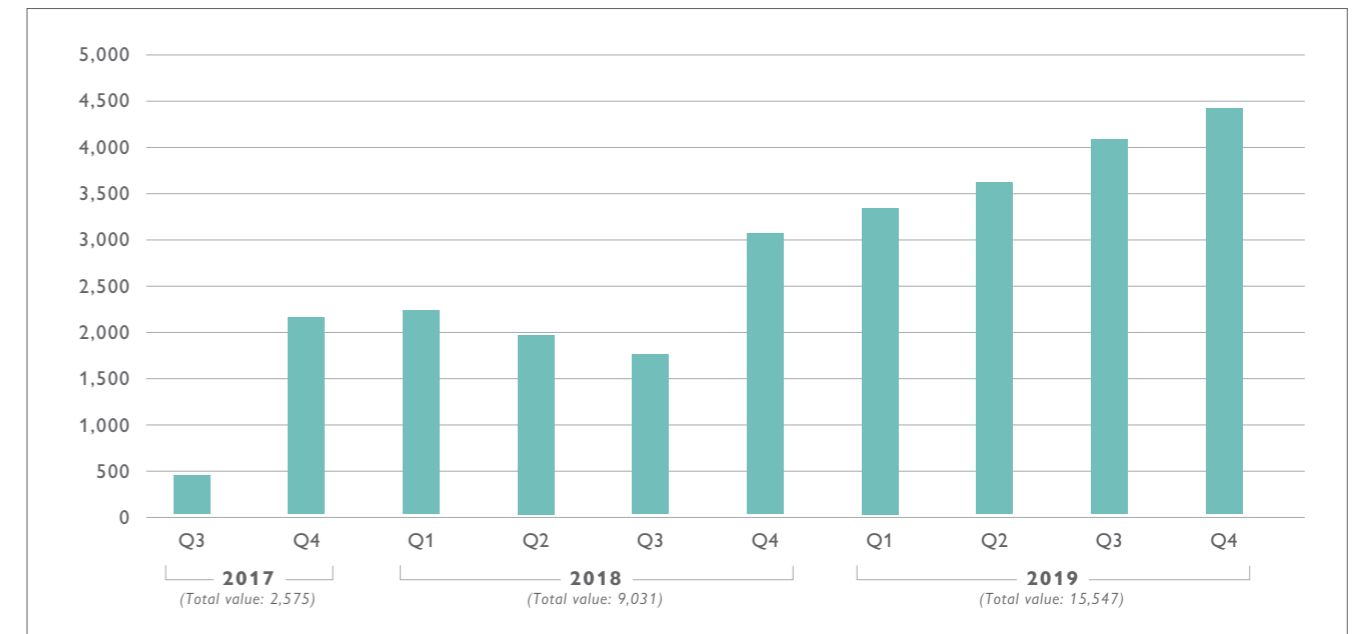
3.3. HUMANITARIAN RESCUE OPERATIONS OF FOREIGN MIGRANTS AT THE ALGERIA/THE NIGER BORDER

Since September 2017, the Government of Algeria intensified the return of foreign migrants from Algeria to the Niger. The migrants, who, according to the Government of Algeria are staying irregularly in Algeria and arrived through the Niger, are dropped at “Point Zero” just across the border with the Niger and around 12 kilometres from Assamaka, which is the nearest town in the Niger. IOM conducts Humanitarian Rescue Operations (HRO) to assist these migrants and bring them to the reception site in Assamaka where they receive basic assistance, including food, water and NFI kits. While IOM is usually notified in advance of these returns and can prepare the HRO, there are some instances in which IOM is not alerted

of the arrival and migrants arrive in Assamaka by their own means. The migrants who opt to partake in IOM’s AVRR programme (the large majority) are subsequently transported to the IOM transit centre in Arlit where they are registered.

Between September 2017, when the HROs started, and December 2019, IOM has assisted a total of 27,153 migrants in Assamaka: 2,575 migrants in 2017, 9,031 migrants in 2018 and 15,547 in 2019 (see Graph 8). As is demonstrated in graph 8, the number of migrants assisted in Assamaka has consistently increased between 2017 and 2019.

Graph 8: Number of migrants assisted with Humanitarian Rescue Operations in Assamaka (2017–2019)



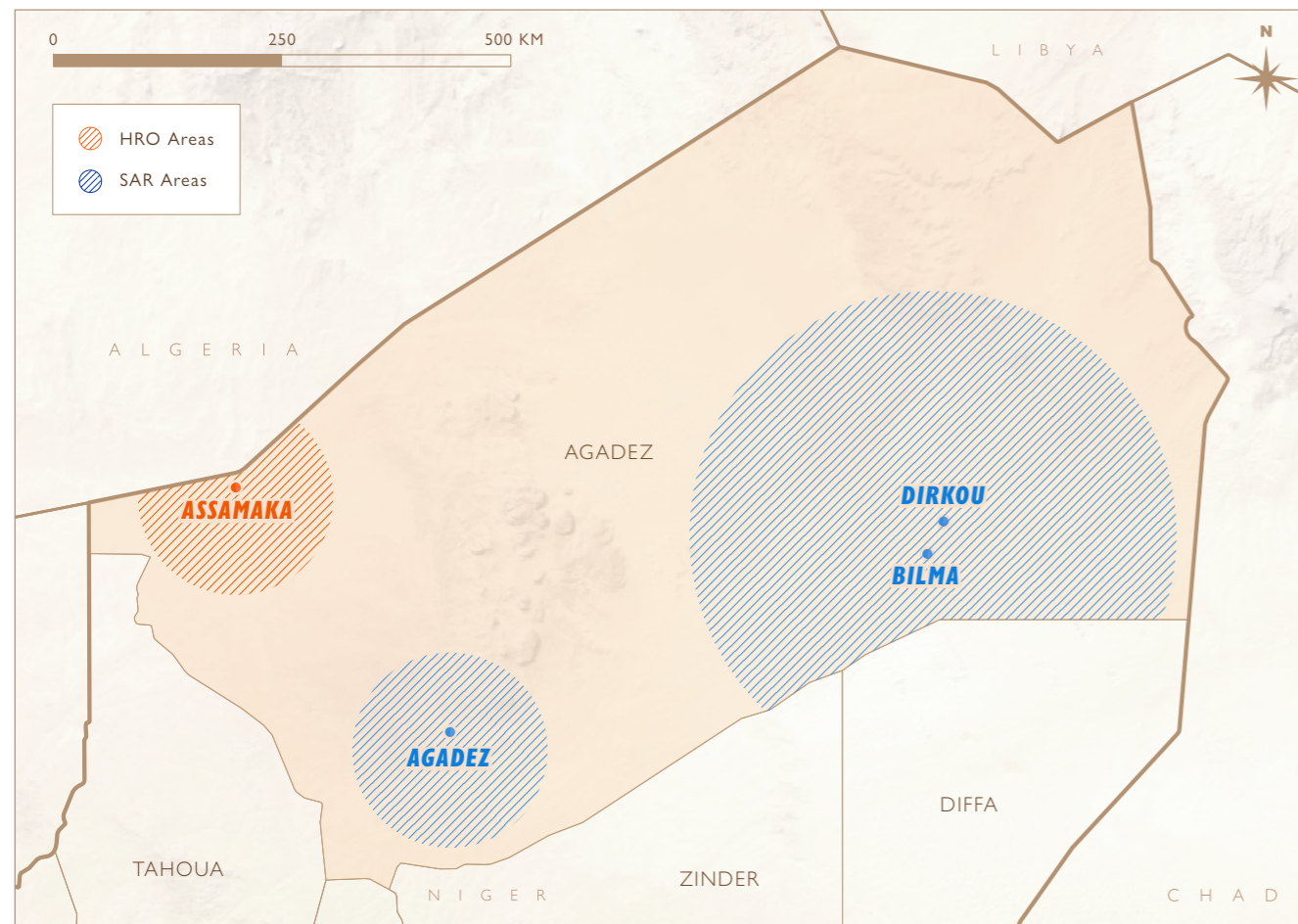
Between 2017 and 2019, the majority of the migrants expelled from Algeria come from Mali and Guinea (together 58%). As most of the migrants who are assisted in Assamaka

are transferred to the IOM transit centre where more in-depth information is collected, section 2.3 will present more in-depth profiles of these migrants.

Table 2: Most common nationalities among migrants assisted with HROs between 2017 and 2019

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	2017	2018	2019	AVERAGE
Mali	23%	35%	35%	34%
Guinea	27%	30%	21%	24%
Niger	29%	6%	12%	12%
Côte d'Ivoire	4%	7%	6%	6%
Cameroon	2%	6%	5%	5%
Burkina Faso	3%	3%	4%	4%
Senegal	3%	4%	3%	4%
Gambia	0%	1%	3%	2%
Benin	3%	2%	2%	2%
Sierra Leone	0%	1%	3%	2%
Other	4%	5%	6%	5%

Map 2: HRO and SAR areas



3.4. SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN THE AGADEZ REGION

Besides the Humanitarian Rescue Operations that IOM Niger conducts in the Assamaka area, IOM also conducts search and rescue operations (SAR) in the Agadez region, most notably around the cities of Agadez, Bilma and Dirkou, in close partnership with the Agadez region's Director General of the National Police (DGPN) and Civil Protection (DGPC). These SAR operations are either proactive (in which case the SAR team, consisting of IOM and the DGPC, patrols the area in search of stranded migrants) or reactive (in which case IOM is notified of stranded migrants who are in distress and alerts DGPC to send the SAR team. In both cases, if migrants accept IOM's assistance, rescued migrants are transported to the closest IOM transit centre where they receive basic assistance, including food and water, as well as information about IOM's services and the availability of the AVR program, in case they wish to return to their country of origin.

Table 3: Number of migrants assisted during SAR Operations in the Agadez region (2016–2019)

YEAR	ARLIT	AGADEZ	BILMA/DIRKOU	TOTAL
2016	22	0	125	147
2017	20	282	642	944
2018	0	166	222	388
2019	0	167	93	260
TOTAL	42	615	1,082	1,739

Between 2016 and 2019, IOM conducted 79 SAR operations, where altogether, 1,739 migrants were assisted, an average of 22 migrants per operation. The average in the Agadez area was 20 migrants per rescue operation, while in Dirkou/Bilma it was slightly higher with 26 migrants per operation. Of the 1,739 rescued migrants, 1,722 were transferred to an IOM transit centre where they were further assisted with voluntary return to their country of origin.

3.5. OFFICIAL CONVOYS FROM ALGERIA

As mentioned before, Nigeriens who are in Algeria without proper documentation are picked up by the Algerian police and transported from Algeria to Agadez. Upon arrival in Agadez, they are received by Nigerien authorities and assisted with onward transportation to their communities or origin. IOM assists the regional authorities with the registration of migrants upon arrival in Agadez and provides basic assistance.

Between December 2014 and December 2019, 49,112 Nigerien migrants were repatriated through 151 convoys. The number of repatriated Nigerien migrants peaked in 2018, when the number doubled from 6,800 in 2017 to 14,919 in 2018, after which it reduced to 10,772 migrants in 2019. Although the convoys should only include Nigerien migrants, it does happen that foreign migrants are accidentally included in the convoys. Between 2014 and 2019, a total of 1,370 foreign migrants (2,7%) were included in the convoys, the majority coming from Nigeria, Mali and Benin.

Table 4: Official convoys from Algeria (2014–2019)

YEAR	# CONVOYS	# MIGRANTS
2014	5	1,345
2015	20	5,986
2016	20	9,290
2017	14	6,800
2018	44	14,919
2019	48	10,772
TOTAL	151	49,112

3.6. VOLUNTARY HUMANITARIAN RETURNS FROM LIBYA TO THE NIGER

The difficult living conditions of migrants, coupled with the security situation and the risk of detention in Libya, have compelled many Nigeriens to leave the country and return to the Niger. To support these migrants, IOM started the voluntary humanitarian return (VHR) programme for vulnerable Nigeriens who wish to return from Libya to the Niger in 2016, in close collaboration and coordination with the Government of the Niger. Between 2016 and 2019, 8,184 Nigeriens were repatriated from Libya through charter flights operated by the Nigerien Government and IOM as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Charters from Libya (2016–2019)

YEAR	IOM CHARTERS	MIGRANTS	GOVERNMENT OF THE NIGER CHARTERS	MIGRANTS
2016	2	338		
2017	2	440	7	3,115
2018	17	2,663		
2019	11	1,628		
TOTAL	32	5,069	7	3,115
GRAND TOTAL				8 184



Migrants arriving in the Niger after returning from Libya through VHR. © IOM, 2019/IOM Niger.

3.7. ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN FROM THIRD COUNTRIES TO THE NIGER

Nigerien migrants abroad who face difficult living and working conditions, including the inability to obtain official residency, may wish to return to the Niger. IOM offers these migrants the opportunity to partake in the assisted voluntary return (AVR) programme.

Over the past four years, IOM has assisted 472 migrants with their voluntary return to the Niger, the majority of whom were men. Table 6 sets out the countries of temporary residence. Once returned to their communities or origin, they will receive assistance with the reintegration process.

Table 6: AVR from third countries to the Niger (2016–2019)

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	NUMBER OF MIGRANTS
Algeria	382
Belgium	38
Denmark	1
Germany	14
Italy	11
Malta	2
Netherlands	4
Norway	1
Sudan	16
Switzerland	3
TOTAL	472

The voluntary returns of Nigerien migrants from Algeria aim to promote returns of Nigerien migrants from Algeria to place in 2019. These flights aim to promote safe, orderly and dignified returns of vulnerable migrants. IOM is continuously advocating for this option in coordination with Algerian and Nigerien authorities in lieu of the official convoys, especially for vulnerable migrants.

In total, IOM has returned 279 migrants from Algeria in late 2019. Among the returnees there were 268 men, 4 women, 5 boys and 2 girls. Showing a similar pattern as the voluntary humanitarian returns from Libya, the majority of the returnees were young males between the ages of 20 and 29 (42%). Most of the returnees came from Tahoua (55%), followed by Zinder (20%) and Niamey (10%).

3.8. ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN FROM THE NIGER TO THIRD COUNTRIES

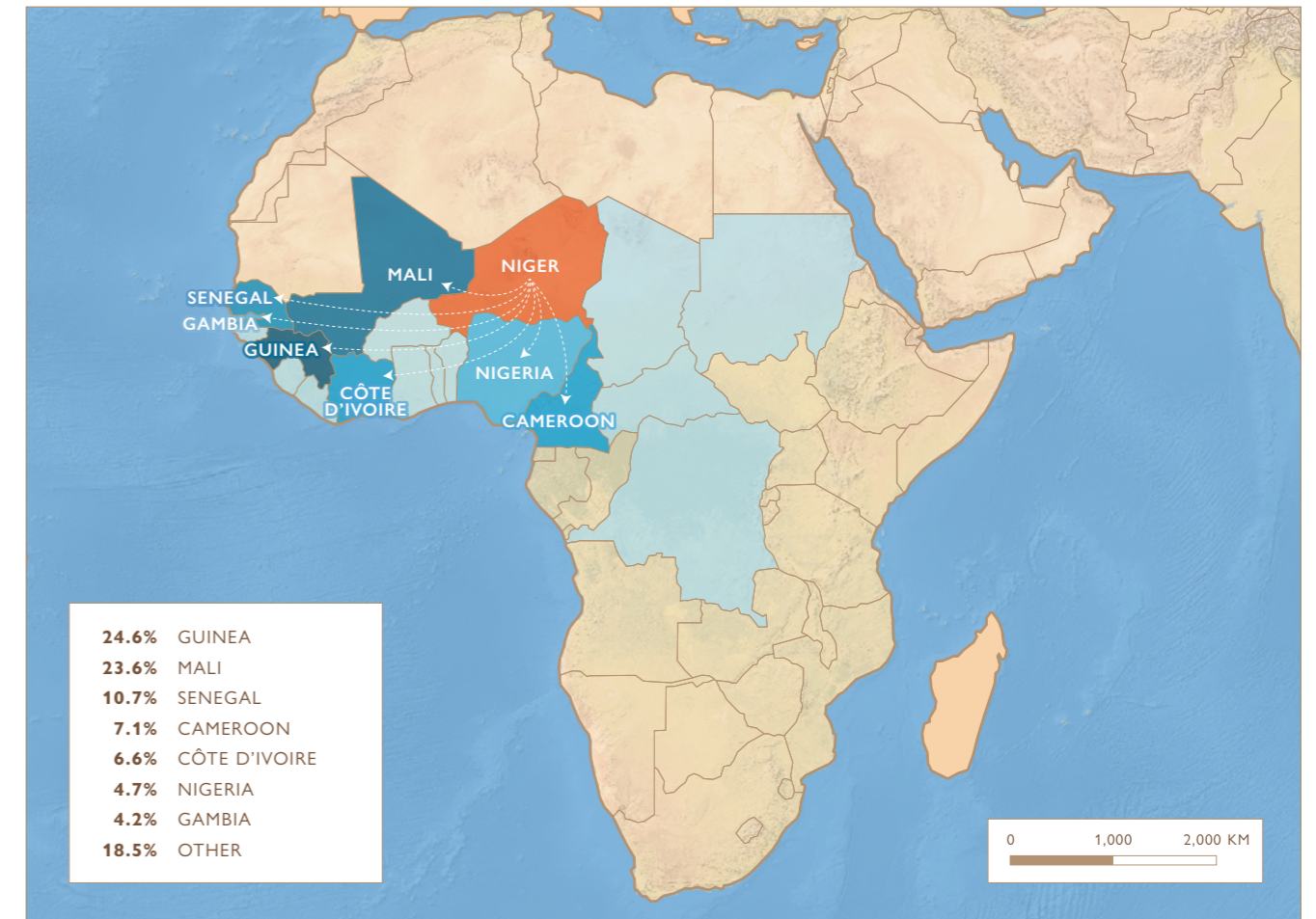
Between 2016 and 2019, IOM has supported 42,604 foreign migrants with AVR from the Niger to their country of origin. The high number of migrants assisted with AVR from the Niger in 2018 and 2019, as demonstrated in table 7, is directly linked to the increase in migrants expelled from Algeria, accounting for 78 per cent of all AVR cases. In comparison, the proportion of expelled migrants as part of all migrants assisted with AVR in 2016 and 2017 was 23 per cent.

In the last four years, most of the migrants who returned home come from the Niger came from Guinea and Mali, and 95 per cent of the returned migrants were young men. A more detailed analysis of the profiles of the migrants returned to their country of origin can be found under Section 4.2 “Migrants in the transit centres”.

In 2019, IOM Niger recorded the highest number of migrants participating in voluntary returns globally (see table 7).²⁵

25 International Organization for Migration. 2020. 2019 Return and Reintegration Key Highlights. Available at: www.publications.iom.int/books/2019-return-and-reintegration-key-highlights.

Map 3: Countries of origin for migrants assisted with AVR from the Niger (2016–2019)



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.

Graph 9: Migrants assisted with AVR from the Niger to Country of Origin (2016–2019)

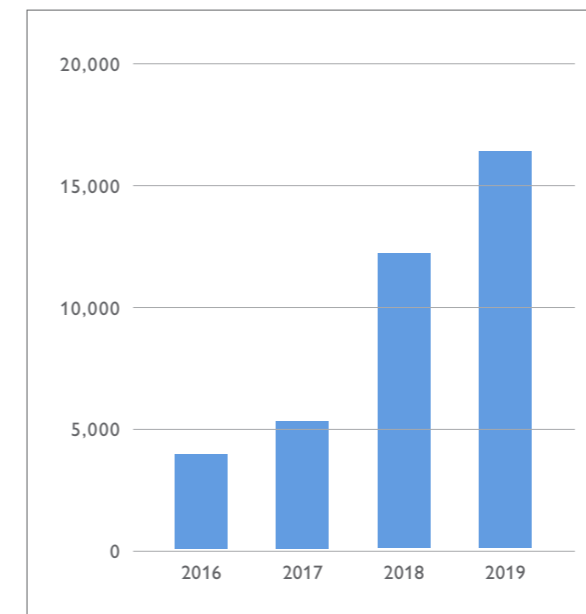


Table 7: Top 10 host/transit countries for assisted voluntary return and reintegration (2019)

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF MIGRANTS ASSISTED WITH AVR IN 2019
Niger	16,378
Germany	13,053
Djibouti	4,220
Greece	3,854
Netherlands	3,035
Austria	2,840
Turkey	2,533
Mexico	2,244
Belgium	2,183
Mali	1,429

SECTION IV: MIGRANT PROFILES

The last section of this report will take a more in-depth look at the data

from section three, and present the profiles of migrants as follows:

- Nigerien and foreign migrants who are registered at the Flow Monitoring Points in Séguedine and Arlit;
- Nigerien and foreign migrants assisted in the transit centres, including those expelled from Algeria;
- Nigerien migrants who are registered upon their return in Agadez from Algeria through official convoys;
- Nigerien migrants assisted with VHR from Libya and AVR from third countries.

This will paint a more complete picture of the characteristics of people on the move in the Niger and will deepen the understanding of the background, demography the profiles and the motivations of these migrants.

4.1. MIGRANTS REGISTERED AT FLOW MONITORING POINTS

At the two Flow Monitoring Points analysed in this report, Séguedine (on the way to Libya) and Arlit (on the way to Algeria), basic demographic data (nationality, age, sex) has been collected among transiting migrants since 2016. In late 2018, IOM started collecting more detailed data at FMPs through its Flow Monitoring Survey (which includes also education level, marital status, and reasons for departure). Therefore, the information presented below is only for 2018 and 2019.

Both FMPs are first analysed separately, before the profiles of the migrants are compared.

4.1.1. Séguedine

As 2016 was the last year that saw many foreign migrants transiting through Séguedine, it is worth looking at the nationalities in this period. Migrants travelling to Libya were mainly from Nigeria (22%), the Gambia (15%) and Senegal (13%). Nigeriens were in the majority among the incoming flows (81%) with a smaller number from Nigeria and Mali. Between 2017–2019, the most frequently observed foreign nationalities were Libyan, Nigerian and Chadian, but the large majority of registered migrants was Nigerien.

Most migrants observed in Séguedine between 2016 and 2019 were male (92%), a trend that remained consistent throughout the years, with males between the ages of 20 and 34 accounting for 50 per cent of all migrants. Most female migrants are between the ages of 20 and 29 years old (57% of all female migrants).

Comparing between male and female migrants, the percentage of married migrants is much higher among males than among females (78% for male; 45% for female). Nigeriens are more likely to be married (almost 80%) as opposed to foreign migrants (53%). A small proportion of Nigerien women reported to be divorced (17%) or single (16%), whereas practically all foreign female migrants reported to be married. Looking at the level of education, more female migrants (71%) received a formal education than men (64%). Eighty-two per cent of the migrants registered in Séguedine were travelling alone, with men more likely to be travelling alone (84%) than female migrants (52%).

With regard to their pre-migration employment status, the number of male migrants that is unemployed (67%) is much higher than female migrants without work (43%). Almost all migrants, both male and female, indicated that economic considerations were the main reason to migrate and that they used their savings to finance their journey.

4.1.2. Arlit

The top five nationalities of foreign migrants observed at the FMPs changed considerably over the period covered in this report.

Table 8: Nationalities of outgoing and incoming flows at Arlit FMP (2016–2019)

COUNTRY	2016	2017	2018	2019
Niger	17%	33%	60%	82%
Mali	13%	9%	6%	3%
Guinea	11%	8%	6%	2%
Nigeria	9%	7%	4%	2%
Other	49%	42%	24%	11%

Like in Séguedine, most migrants observed at the FMP in Arlit are male (55% of all migrants registered) and among them, most are young men (45% of male migrants are between the age of 20 and 29). Among the female migrants registered, 57% was between the age of 25 and 34 years. The percentage of married migrants is significantly higher among Nigeriens (59%) than foreign migrants (28%). The same percentage of male migrants (44%) as female migrants (44%) is married. When comparing Nigerien and foreign migrants, other interesting observations can be made. Eleven per cent of the female Nigerien migrants report being divorced, with the same percentage of female Nigerien migrants reporting to be single.

When looking at the employment situation of the migrants, 58 per cent of male migrants reported to be unemployed and looking for work against 43 per cent of female migrants. Similar percentages (both around 42%) of male and female migrants were self-employed when they transited through Arlit. Most migrants registered at the FMP in Arlit, both male and female, did not have any formal education (52% male; 43% female). Of all female migrants, 29 per cent had secondary education as opposed to only 14 per cent of the male migrants. The majority, around 65 per cent of the migrants, reported to pay for their travel through savings. Twenty-four per cent reported that they received financial support from family and friends in their community of origin to finance their journey. More migrants travelled in a group than alone (76% of male migrants and 68% of female migrants).²⁶

4.1.3. Comparison between Séguedine and Arlit FMP

In 2016, Nigerien migrants made up 30 per cent of all registered migrants, whereas in 2017, after enforcement of Law 2015-36, Nigerien migrants accounted for 73 per cent of all flows, although the absolute numbers of Nigerien migrants remained rather similar (132,982 in 2016 and 121,789 in 2017). This trend continued throughout 2018 and 2019 and can be explained by the fact that Nigerien migrants were not targeted by the implementation of the Law 2015-36. A higher proportion of foreign nationals transited Arlit compared to Séguedine between 2016 and 2019 (Arlit: 50,5% foreign migrants; Séguedine: 43% foreign migrants).

Among foreign migrants, 72 per cent of the migrants to and from Algeria are single as opposed to 45 per cent recorded in Séguedine, on their way to Libya. There is no significant difference between the levels of education between the two flows of foreign migrants. Nigeriens migrating from and to Algeria are less likely to be married (59%) than those travelling from and to Libya (80%). Flows to and from Algeria include more foreign migrants (40%) who tend to be single and have a higher education level, which could be indicative of their intentions to travel to countries in North Africa or Europe. Generally, the FMS conducted in the West and Central Africa region in 2018 showed that 43 per cent of migrants who planned to travel to North Africa and 45 per cent of the migrants who planned to continue to Europe, have a secondary degree compared to 36 per cent migrating within West and Central Africa.²⁷

Migrants travelling to and from Libya, which are mainly Nigeriens (around 90%) tend to be married and have lower education levels than those in Arlit on their way to Algeria. This may be indicative of a more stable, circular and seasonal migration flow of Nigerien workers who are travelling to Libya. Data collected by IOM Libya shows that 21 per cent of the 654,801 foreign migrants in Libya comes from the Niger (in December 2019). Most of them work in construction and agriculture and reside predominantly in the western and southern regions of the country (Sebha, Murzuq, Misrata and Tripoli), usually for periods longer than six months. When asked for their motive for migration, 94 per cent reported that they travelled to Libya in pursuit of economic opportunities. This is further demonstrated by the fact that 60 per cent of the Nigerien migrants in Libya reported to be unemployed when they were in the Niger, while 70 per cent of the Nigerien migrants in Libya are now employed. Almost half of the Nigerien migrants in Libya have no formal education.

4.2. MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT CENTRES

Between 2016 and 2019, 49,752 foreign migrants received assistance in one or more of IOM's six transit centres (Arlit, Agadez, Dirkou, and three in Niamey). The migrants are registered in the central database (MARS) at the first transit centre where they arrive, as shown in table 10, but often pass through different centres before departing to their country of origin. The majority of the migrants are registered in the Arlit transit centre, which is the one closest to Assamaka where they arrive after being expelled from Algeria.

²⁶ Among the female migrants who were asked this question, 8 per cent reported "blank". For male migrants, this was only 2 per cent.

²⁷ International Organization for Migration. 2020. Data collected by the IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa in Dakar.

Table 9: Place of registration of migrants in transit centres (2016–2019)

YEAR	AGADEVZ	ARLIT	DIRKOU	NIAMEY	GRAND TOTAL
2016	2,249	2,271	343	1,114	5,977
2017	3,612	2,026	1,109	1,438	8,185
2018	3,135	13,234	488	1,171	18,028
2019	1,469	14,639	61	1,393	17,562
GRAND TOTAL	10,465	32,170	2,001	5,116	49,752

The number of foreign migrants registered in the transit centre in Arlit has increased in line with the growing number of expulsions from Algeria since later 2017, while the numbers in Dirkou and Agadez peaked in 2017 because of the large number of migrants who were stranded in these regions and rescued through the SAR operations mentioned in section 3.4.

With regard to nationalities, 58 per cent of the migrants assisted in the transit centres are from Mali or Guinea. Female migrants constitute only 5 per cent of total number of migrants assisted, the majority coming from Nigeria and the Central African Republic.

Table 10: Nationalities of migrants assisted at transit centres in the Niger (2016–2019)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	GRAND TOTAL
Guinea	1,519	1,506	4,909	3,344	11,278
Mali	396	701	4,535	5,501	11,133
Senegal	1,308	1,525	1,102	810	4,745
Niger					4,185*
Cameroon	534	670	1,568	1,117	3,889
Côte d'Ivoire	490	492	1,212	1,145	3,339
Nigeria	221	1,189	1,014	757	3,181
Sierra Leone	118	148	549	1,124	1,939
Gambia	416	513	327	627	1,883
Liberia	159	355	956	327	1,797
Burkina Faso	159	168	532	704	1,563
Guinea-Bissau	438	423	227	463	1,551
Benin	34	84	259	790	1,167
Other	149	412	850	876	2,287
GRAND TOTAL	5,941	8,186	18,040	17,585	53,937

* Data for the Niger is not available per year but only cumulative. They do not partake in the AVRR programme and are thus not added into the database.

When the registration in the transit centres takes place, migrants can voluntarily agree to completing a questionnaire that collects information on their socioeconomic background, including education level, marital and employment status as well as reasons for migration and intended destination. Below are some of the key observations:

- Sixty-nine per cent of the migrants are single while 27 per cent was married upon registration in the transit centre, with similar trends observed among male and female migrants.²⁸
- Twenty-four per cent of the migrants reported not to have any formal education, while 12 per cent reported to have primary education and 27 per cent secondary education. 7 per cent of the registered migrants had attended koranic schools in their country of origin.²⁹
- Looking at the reasons for migration, 48 per cent of the migrants mentioned that they took the decision to migrate to search for better economic opportunities

(23% to escape poverty and 25 % to look for a new job). Yet, 60 per cent of the migrants were engaged in some form of economic activity before departure and 54 per cent of the migrants financed their journey themselves through their own funds or savings. Others used money borrowed from friends and family to finance their journey.

- Libya and Algeria remained the most preferred countries of destination for all migrants. The trend reversed over the reporting period, with migrants being more inclined to travel to Libya in 2016 than in 2019, while for Algeria it was vice versa. This can be explained by the reasons mentioned earlier in this report, including but not limited to, the worsening security situation in Libya, the increased number of police controls in the northern parts of the Niger where migrants transit to Libya, as well as the fact that the majority of the migrants who filled in the questionnaire were returned from Algeria.

Table 11: Percentage of migrants stating that Algeria or Libya was their country of destination (2016–2019)

COUNTRY	2016	2017	2018	2019	AVERAGE
Algeria	39%	14%	31%	85%	48%
Libya	27%	20%	6%	3%	10%
Other	34%	66%	63%	12%	42%



IOM transit centre in Niamey. © IOM, 2019/IOM Niger.

²⁸ The remaining 4 per cent of migrants reported to be either divorced or widowed.

²⁹ The remaining 30 per cent of migrants reported to have superior education (6%) and 24 per cent preferred not to answer.

4.3. NIGERIEN MIGRANTS RETURNING WITH OFFICIAL CONVOYS FROM ALGERIA

Between 2016–2019, most of the Nigerien migrants repatriated through Official convoys from Algeria were male (72%) but the gender balance changed over the years.

The most predominant age group between 2016 and 2019 among females was between 0–14 years old, accounting for 54 per cent of all repatriated female migrants. For men, 64 per cent of the repatriated migrants were between the age

of 15–34 years. When analysing the age distribution more closely, it can be observed that 27 per cent of all repatriated migrants, male and female, were between the age of 0 and 14 years old. Forty-four per cent of these young migrants were younger than five years old, either accompanied or unaccompanied.

Table 12: Nigerien migrants returning with official convoys from Algeria (2016–2019)

YEAR	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL
	#	%	#	%	#
2016	7,704	69,3%	3,418	30,7%	11,122
2017	5,714	66,2%	2,918	33,8%	8,632
2018	10,845	64,7%	5,909	35,3%	16,754
2019	9,773	77,5%	2,831	22,5%	12,604
TOTAL	34,036	69,3%	15,076	30,7%	49,112

70 per cent of the repatriated Nigerien migrants from Algeria come from the region of Zinder, followed by Agadez (11%) and Tahoua (9%). The regions of Diffa and Tillabéri only account for 0,7 per cent of all repatriated migrants. Of the migrants coming from the region of Zinder, the largest proportion comes from the department of Kantché.³⁰ To better understand this phenomenon, IOM Niger conducted a study in 2016 on migrants who originate from Kantché and who were repatriated to the Niger through the official convoys. Based on this study, several observations can be made about this group:

- Migration is a traditional coping strategy, as inhabitants from Kantché have used migration as a means for livelihood for decades. People from Kantché have also regularly migrated to Nigeria for job opportunities, however, due to the growing insecurity in northern Nigeria with the emergence of Boko Haram in 2009, the migration routes and journeys of people from Zinder started to shift northwards towards Algeria instead;

- Few employment opportunities paired with large household sizes in Kantché ranging from seven to 25 individuals (compared to the national average of 7.1 persons) lead many migrants to seek opportunities abroad to support their families;
- Finally, migration has become a factor for social change in Kantché. Due to a significant number of women migrating from Kantché (37% women, 38% children between 2014 and 2016), the traditional patriarchal societal practices and traditions have changed. The decision to migrate to Algeria often comes from the women themselves, or from their parents, and many times the male partners are not necessarily consulted in the decision-making process. This autonomy mainly comes from the fact that women have access to their own resources and therefore do not need their spouse's financial support to migrate.

³⁰ International Organization for Migration. 2016. *Des femmes et des enfants de Kantché sur la route de l'Algérie: Analyse socio-anthropologique d'un phénomène mal connu. Niamey.*



4.4. NIGERIEN MIGRANTS RETURNED THROUGH VOLUNTARY RETURNS

Of the 8,184 migrants who returned from Libya with Voluntary Humanitarian Return between 2016 and 2019 (see section 3.6), 88 per cent were male (see table 13). The percentage of male migrants was much lower in the first year (63%), which can be explained by the fact that the most vulnerable cases were repatriated in the first charter flights, who are mainly women and children. This also explains why the percentage of children under the age of 14 was almost twice as high in 2016 (27%) than in 2019 (14%). The predominant group among the returnees over the last four years were male migrants between the ages of 20–29 years, making up for 60 per cent of the total of returnees.

Most of the migrants that returned from Libya come from Tahoua (48%), Maradi (18%) and Zinder (15%). In total, IOM facilitated the return of 279 migrants from Algeria in late 2019 through AVR. Among the returnees there were 268 men, 4 women, 5 boys and 2 girls. Showing a similar pattern as the Voluntary Humanitarian Returns from Libya, the majority of the returnees were young males between the ages of 20 and 29 (42%). Most of the returnees came from Tahoua (55%), followed by Zinder (20%) and Niamey (10%).

Table 13: Sex/Age distribution among Nigerien migrants returned through VHR (2016–2019)

AGE GROUP	MALE (88% OF ALL RETURNNEES)	FEMALE (12% OF ALL RETURNNEES)
0–9	6%	42%
10–19	6%	8%
20–29	53%	33%
30–39	26%	17%
40–49	7%	0%
50 and older	2%	0%

CONCLUSION

The Niger was, is, and will be, an important hub for intraregional, interregional and internal migration. Its location makes it a key transit country for migrants from West and Central Africa, as numerous regional migration routes converge and cross through Nigerien territory en route for Libya and Algeria. Only for a small proportion of migrants is the Niger their country of destination.

As this report has demonstrated, mobility in the Niger has many interacting layers, including circular movements of Nigerien seasonal workers who work in Libya and Algeria; migration of women and children going to Algeria; and migration to regions in the Niger with economic activity, such as gold mines, oil drilling sites and crop-raising areas where some migrants may work temporarily during their transit period in the Niger to save money before continuing their journey. Two other important dimensions of mobility in the Niger are the repatriation of Nigeriens to Agadez since 2014 and the expulsion of migrants from West and Central Africa to Assamaka/Point Zero by the Government of Algeria which intensified since 2017.

Migration trends have shifted significantly between 2016 and 2019 as a result of many factors: the ongoing crisis in Libya and growing insecurity in the border regions since 2011; the adoption of the 2015-36 Law by the Government of the Niger that criminalizes irregular migration; the discovery and closure of gold mines in the Niger; stricter immigration policies adopted by Algeria; and the deteriorating living and working conditions of migrants in Libya, were all major factors that contributed to significant changes in migration to, within and from the Niger.

The number of migrants observed migrating to and from the Niger and Algeria and Libya overland, as captured through flow monitoring, changed drastically after 2016. The implementation of the 2015-36 Law in the Niger led to the fragmentation of migration routes in efforts by smugglers and migrants to evade increased patrols and security forces enforcing the law, contributing to a steep decrease (62%) in migration flows observed in 2017 compared to 2016, particularly to Libya. The sociodemographic makeup of migrants also changed after 2016. The overall makeup of migrants transiting through the Niger became less diverse, particularly along the route to and from Libya, as the number of foreign migrants observed dropped by over 80 per cent in 2017 compared to 2016, and the number of female migrants observed in 2017 and 2018 decreased compared to 2016. Similarly, along the route to and from Algeria, the number of foreign migrants observed dropped by 50 per cent in 2018 and continued to decrease in 2019. Conversely,

an increasing number of Nigeriens were observed going to Algeria and for longer periods of time. This increase in Nigeriens going to Algeria is a stark contrast from previous years where Libya was the primary destination for Nigeriens engaged in circular migration.

Starting in 2017 and continuing into 2019, a new trend emerged with the increasing numbers of expelled migrants from Algeria to the Niger. Together with the official convoys of Nigerien migrants, who return each week from Algeria, these return movements now make up the largest migration movement in the Niger, with 27,000 in total in 2019 alone. The strict enforcement of immigration policies in Algeria has led to an unprecedented number of foreign migrants, mainly Guineans and Malians, being expelled from Algeria to the Niger. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of migrants staying in IOM's transit centres who have subsequently been assisted with voluntary return to countries of origin, mainly in West and Central Africa. Largely due to the high number of expulsion, IOM Niger was the largest 'sending' AVR mission of all IOM missions globally in 2019.

In 2018, IOM also began capturing migration flows within the Niger through flow monitoring, as the Niger is not only a transit country but also a destination country for people looking for economic opportunities mainly in Arlit, Tchibaraketen and Agadez where economic zones of interest, such as gold mines, attract both Nigeriens and foreign, mainly male, migrants.

This report has shown that migration in the Niger is internal, intraregional and interregional with Nigerien and foreign migrants travelling to parts of northern Niger for employment opportunities, as well as interregional with migrants mainly from West and Central Africa, including Nigeriens, heading to Libya and Algeria to find economic opportunities. The data shows that the large majority of migrants does not have the desire to travel to Europe. Moreover, while reasons for migration seem to primarily be economic, there are plenty of other factors driving migration. The multidimensional migration trends in the Niger demonstrates the critical role of the country as a historical and geographical crossroads between the west, central and northern regions of Africa.



IOM Niger thanks its team of flow monitors and its Data and Research Unit for collecting data on a daily basis in challenging circumstances. © IOM, 2020/IOM Niger.

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