Quarterly Mixed Migration Update:
West Africa

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the West Africa (WA) region. The core countries of focus for this region are Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to any of the countries over the rest.

The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions.

The Mixed Migration Centre is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. For more information on the MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit mixedmigration.org and follow us at @Mixed_Migration

MMC's understanding of mixed migration

"Mixed migration" refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have a range of legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel - often travelling irregularly, and wholly, or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

Front cover photo credit:
Jean-Baptiste Joire (2017)
Women watching boats in Joal-Fadiout, Senegal, February 2017.

Quarterly Mixed Migration Update:
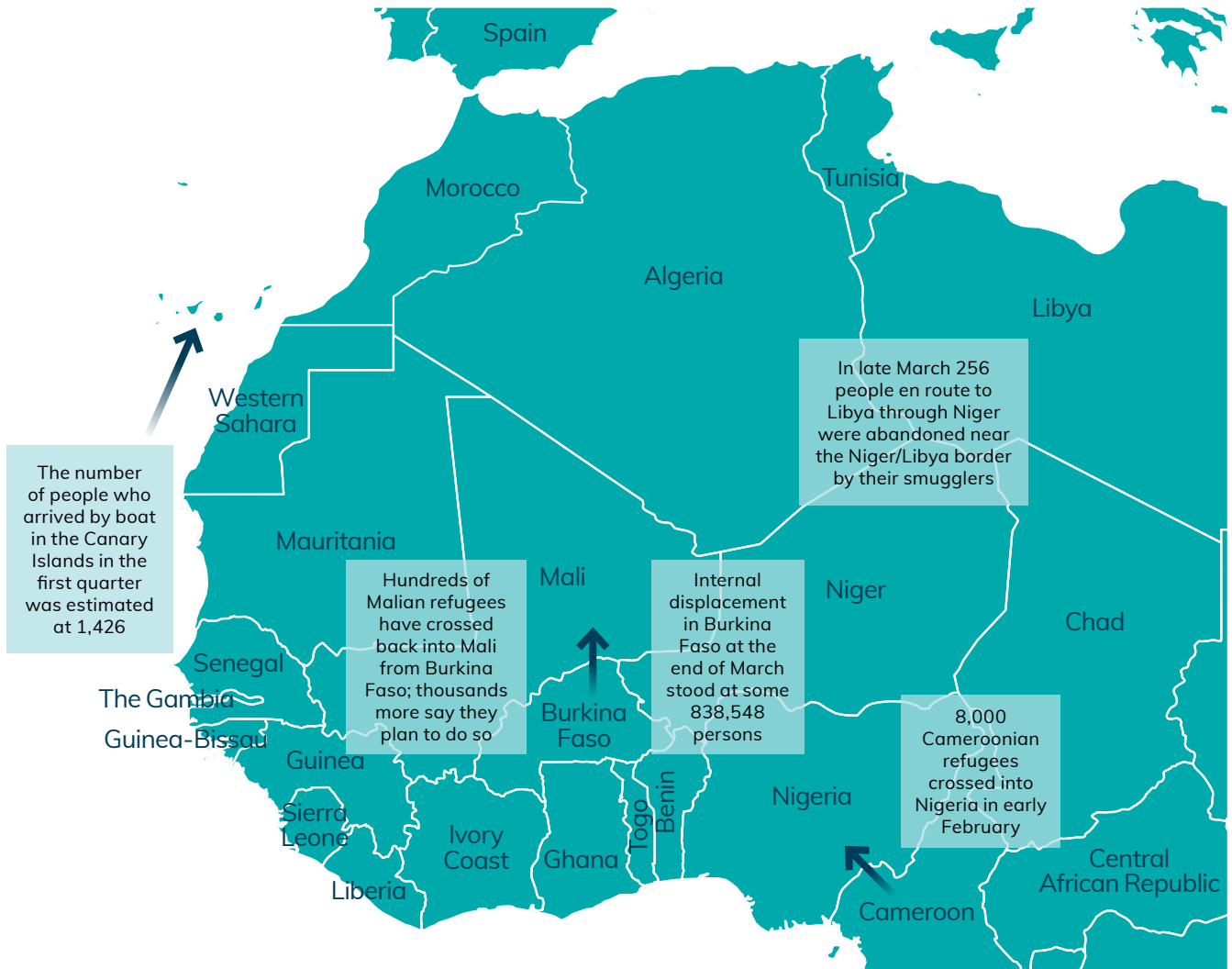# West Africa

Quarter 1 - 2020

Key Updates

- **Canary Islands arrivals:** In the first three months of 2020, boat arrivals in the Canary Islands of approximately 1,426 persons[1] had already surpassed 50% of the 2019 total of 2,700 persons.

- **Spiraling displacement in Burkina Faso:** As of 25 March, the number of internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso was an estimated 838,548. This is another substantial increase over the total at the end of the last quarter, when figures stood at 560,033 as of 31 December 2019.

- **Cameroonian refugees:** In the first two weeks of February, around the 9 February elections in Cameroon, nearly 8,000 Cameroonians fled violence between armed groups and security forces, crossing into southeastern Nigeria.

- **Abandoned migrants and refugees in Niger:** Some 256 people en route to Libya were left in the desert near the Niger/Libya border by the smugglers who had accompanied them. The group, which also included a baby, comprised many Nigerians (104), Ghanaians (53) and Burkinabés (34), among others. They were taken to Agadez where they were being hosted in the local stadium during a 14 day Covid-19 quarantine period.

- **Covid-19 mobility impacts:** The Covid-19 pandemic has affected mobility across West Africa. As of the end of March, borders remained open only in Benin, the Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Liberia and Sierra Leone. International air travel was also almost entirely halted; only Benin and Togo were still open to international flights, and Sierra Leone's airport was open with restrictions. Border closures have stranded travelers in a variety of locations across the region.

- **ECHR ruling:** On 13 February, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) overturned the Court's previous ruling on a case brought by two West African asylum seekers. It found that the Spanish authorities in the autonomous city of Melilla, which borders Morocco, had not violated their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights when it turned them over to Moroccan authorities without allowing them to make an asylum claim. According to the Grand Chamber, the two men "did not make use of the official entry procedures existing for that purpose," although human rights advocates, NGOs and UN bodies expressed skepticism that such procedures were effectively available.

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1   Based on a compilation of numbers from UNHCR's Spain Weekly Snapshot, Weeks 1-13, 2020

Regional Overview*

Spain

Morocco

Tunisia

Algeria

Libya

In late March 256 people en route to Libya through Niger were abandoned near the Niger/Libya border by their smugglers

Western Sahara

The number of people who arrived by boat in the Canary Islands in the first quarter was estimated at 1,426

Mauritania

Mali

Niger

Chad

Hundreds of Malian refugees have crossed back into Mali from Burkina Faso; thousands more say they plan to do so

Internal displacement in Burkina Faso at the end of March stood at some 838,548 persons

Senegal

The Gambia

Guinea-Bissau

Guinea

Burkina Faso

Togo

Benin

Nigeria

8,000 Cameroonian refugees crossed into Nigeria in early February

Sierra Leone

Ivory Coast

Ghana

Central African Republic

Liberia

Cameroon

*Information on the map relates to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration flows within and out of West Africa.

Mixed Migration Regional Updates

West Africa region

In an 8 January briefing to the UN Security Council, the Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel described how "relentless attacks on civilian and military targets have shaken public confidence." In 2019, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger had over 4,000 casualties from attacks by violent armed groups, a fivefold increase over 2016. An article by a security analyst for the World Food Program further characterizes the situation in the central Sahel as one in which attacks occur almost daily, increasingly targeting civilians, eroding trust among communities, leading to soaring displacement and limiting humanitarian access to those who have not been able to flee.

In **Burkina Faso**, where the "operational reach" of armed groups now encompasses a third of the country, civilian killings in 2019 rose by almost 650% over 2018. In the first two months of 2020, at least 11 attacks in Centre-Nord, Sahel and Est regions targeted civilians specifically, leading to more than 81 deaths. Displacement in Burkina Faso continues to spiral. According to a statement made by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on 21 February, "the latest attacks by militants on civilians and local authorities have been forcing a daily average of more than 4,000 people to flee their homes and search for safety since 1 January." As of mid-March, the country hosted approximately 64% of the people displaced in the Central Sahel/Liptako Gourma crisis (as compared to 18% in Mali, 13% in Niger and 5% in Mauritania). By the end of March the number of IDPs had reached 838,548. According to UNHCR, approximately 90% of Burkina Faso's internally displaced are hosted by other Burkinabé families, further straining already scarce community resources.

In terms of cross-border displacement, some 16,000 Burkinabés have sought refuge in neighboring countries. Burkina Faso has also been hosting more than 25,000 refugees from Mali (primarily in its northernmost Sahel region), but the continued violence and its impact on humanitarian access is causing some of them to return to Mali. As of mid-March more than 5,000 of these refugees had chosen to leave Goudoubo camp, located near Dori in Burkina Faso's Sahel region, in order to go back to Mali.

In a briefing given to the UN Security Council on 15 January, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations indicated that "the security situation in **Mali** is deteriorating at an alarming rate." In the first two months of 2020, the number of internally displaced persons in Mali, according to UNHCR reporting, increased by approximately 10,785 over the end-December 2019 total, standing at 218,536 as of the end of February. A subsequent report from OCHA highlighted the new registration of more than 11,000 Malian IDPs in Mopti, central Mali, in a period of only three days, from 7-9 March.

During ten days in the middle of February, approximately 1,000 refugees from central Mali entered Mauritania. This diverges from the more typical pattern of Malian arrivals in Mauritania, which generally average fifty per week, and typically originate from northern Mali. As of the end of February, Mali hosted some 28,657 refugees from other West and Central African nations, primarily Mauritania and Burkina Faso (15,316 and 10,551 refugees respectively). Some 142,110 Malian refugees were being hosted by the neighboring countries of Burkina Faso (25,443), Mauritania (57,836) and Niger (58,831).

On 9 January, the precarious nature of the security situation in the west of **Niger** – characterized by increasing intimidation and violence on the part of armed groups – was underscored by an attack, claimed by Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which killed 89 soldiers. According to UNHCR, "significant displacement" was seen from the regions of Tillabéry and Tahoua following this attack, with people fleeing to communities that already support substantial displaced populations. Some 5,500 people took refuge in the Nigerien towns of Banibangou and Ouallam, which themselves already host 7,326 refugees from Mali. By later February, the number of people who had left border areas and were being hosted in such towns further south had surpassed 11,000. In the same period, more than 4,400 Nigeriens crossed the border, seeking refuge in the Malian towns of Ménaka and Andéramboukane, which already host some 7,700 displaced Malians. As of the end of March, Tillabéry and Tahoua hosted some 97,097 IDPs, 58,599 Malian refugees, and 3,332 persons of concern from Burkina Faso.

As of mid-February, the Diffa region of eastern Niger hosted some 263,000 displaced people who have fled violence in the Lake Chad Basin, about half of whom are refugees, primarily from Nigeria. A stampede on 17 February during a distribution of aid to Nigerian refugees in the Diffa region of Niger resulted in the deaths of 20 people, 15 women and five children. The distribution of food and other assistance had been facilitated by authorities from Nigeria's Borno State, and UNHCR called for all such efforts "to be coordinated with local authorities in Niger as well as with humanitarian actors."

At the end of March, the number of Nigerian refugees who have undergone biometric registration in the Maradi region of Niger stood at 36,183. This represents a very small increase from the end of 2019, at which time 35,363 refugees had been registered. Social media communication from UNHCR in mid-February suggests the overall number of Nigerians who have fled from northwest Nigeria into Maradi in the past year is even greater, placing the figure at 41,000.

The situation in the states of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara in northwestern Nigeria remains unstable, with some 178,475 internally displaced as of February, and movements from these states into Niger continue. Given the persistence of cross-border incursions, and the protection challenges that result, efforts are ongoing to relocate Nigerian refugees further into Niger, away from the border. However, UNHCR is also seeing a substantial disparity between the relocation intentions expressed by refugees during registration and the ultimate relocation decisions made. This is attributed to reluctance towards relocation both among refugees themselves and host communities and their leaders.

As of February, some 2,039,092 people were internally displaced in northeastern **Nigeria** due to the ongoing Boko Haram conflict. Several fires broke out in IDP settlements around Monguno in Borno State during the first quarter of the year. One occurred at Waterboard IDP camp on 12 March, damaging 10 emergency shelters and affecting 14 households. One person died in the fire, and another suffered first degree burns. Less than two weeks later, on 22 March, a second blaze broke out at Waterboard IDP camp, affecting 48 households. One child was injured in the fire, and 56 shelters were damaged.

In the first two weeks of February, surrounding the 9 February elections in **Cameroon**, nearly 8,000 Cameroonians fled violence between armed groups and security forces, crossing into southeastern Nigeria. Some 51,000 Cameroonian refugees were already being hosted across 87 communities and four humanitarian-facilitated settlements in the Nigerian states of Akwa-Ibom, Benue, Cross Rivers and Taraba. This is in addition to the approximately 679,000 persons displaced internally in Cameroon's Northwest and

Southwest regions. An attack on 14 February left 24 civilians dead, and the subsequent week saw further raids, which together have led to additional displacement. Multiple NGOs and UN officials have called for a cessation of violence against civilians, respect for international humanitarian and human rights law and accountability for the abuses that have been committed.

Policy updates

On 31 January, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced visa restrictions on six new nations, including **Nigeria**, in an extension of the Trump administration's contentious travel ban. The new measure would halt the issuance of immigrant visas for Nigerians. In recent years Nigeria has consistently been among the African countries which receive the most US immigrant visas, and some commentators point out the negative economic impact this measure could have for a country with 23% unemployment, for which remittances provide a crucial sustenance. In spite of the fact that in 2018 some 30,000 Nigerians overstayed their non-immigrant visas, the new measures would still allow these visas – which encompass categories such as students or certain temporary workers – to be issued.

Officially, according to the announcement of the new policy on the DHS website, "Nigeria does not comply with the established identity-management and information-sharing criteria assessed by the performance metrics." However, US government officials speaking anonymously to reporters noted the "elevated risk and threat environment in the country." The number of Nigerians who overstay visas was also noted.

This latest restriction, which also institutes visa barriers for Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Sudan and Tanzania, has been widely criticized as discriminatory on grounds of race and religion, and seen as contrary to American values. The Executive Director of Amnesty International USA stated that "the Trump administration's efforts to expand the ban are offensive and actually harmful to our national security." The Nigerian Interior Minister requested that the US government reconsider its decision, stating that Nigeria had addressed most of the issues that the US had raised.

The European Union has also indicated that it plans to introduce stricter measures for Nigerians applying for a Schengen visa in an effort to secure greater cooperation from the Nigerian government in accepting the return of its citizens from Europe. The EU Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy specified that this policy was distinct from the "ban" on Nigerians enacted by the Trump administration.

On 22 January, Italy's Tribunal of Florence ruled on the case of an asylum seeker from **Senegal** claiming international protection on the grounds of sexual orientation. While Senegal was considered a safe third country, the Tribunal ruled that the region of Casamance could not be "considered safe for potential victims of FGM, those deemed to be more vulnerable, members of the LGBT community, journalists and rights activists." As EU law transposed into Italian law allows for specific areas of a country to be excluded from a general finding of safety, the Tribunal reversed the initial rejection of the asylum application.

Senegal also featured in the 2018 Annual Report on the surveillance of external sea borders submitted by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, to the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union on 24 February. In its review of Operation Hera, the joint maritime patrol operation which extends from "the land area of the Canary Islands, to the territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone

of Senegal, as well as its airspace," it noted that Spanish authorities had carried out an assessment of the general situation in Senegal. This assessment confirmed that Senegal is "not engaged in practices such as infringements to the fundamental rights of the persons nor breaches to the principle of non-refoulement." The report urges the establishment of a status agreement between the EU and Senegal. This would allow Frontex to return boats intercepted in Senegal's search and rescue zone to Senegal rather than relying on the national coast guard to do so. (For more on European externalization policies along the Western Mediterranean Route see the Thematic Focus.)

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected mobility across **West Africa**. As of the end of March, borders remained open only in Benin, the Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Liberia and Sierra Leone. International air travel was also almost entirely halted; Benin and Togo were still open to international flights, and Sierra Leone's airport was open with restrictions. Border closures have stranded travelers in a variety of locations across the region.

Mixed migration from West Africa towards North Africa and Europe[2]

Western Mediterranean route

As of 29 March, UNHCR and the Spanish Ministry of Interior estimated that some 5,539 refugees and migrants had arrived in Spain by sea (Balearic Islands, Canary Islands and Spanish mainland) and land (Ceuta and Melilla) since the beginning of the year. This marked a 20% decrease over the same period in 2019. As of the end of February, four of the top six nationalities of arrival were West African. Following Algeria and Morocco as the origin countries with the most arrivals was Mali (14%), Guinea Conakry (7%), Senegal (6%) and Côte d'Ivoire (5%).

Whereas overall irregular arrivals in Spain originating from the south showed a decrease compared with the first quarter of 2019, it is notable that boat arrivals to the Canary Islands continued an upward trend that began towards the end of 2019. According to a compilation of UNHCR's Spain Weekly Snapshots, in the first three months of 2020, some 1,426 migrants and refugees arrived in the Canary Islands, as compared to only 180 in the corresponding period of 2019. This does not take into account those who embarked for the Canary Islands but did not reach them. Accounts from media and UN officials suggest there could be hundreds of people rescued or missing at sea. It is not clear how many of those who were rescued were taken to the Canary Islands and are therefore included in official arrival numbers, but such instances underscore the grave risks this route poses.

According to the Missing Migrants Project of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 43 migrant fatalities were reported on the Western Mediterranean Route overall during the first quarter of the year.[3]

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2   Numbers in this section reflect best estimates available at time data was accessed (late March/early April) but sources may be subject to later updates.
3   As of 3 April 2020.

Central Mediterranean route

As of 29 March, irregular sea arrivals in Italy in the first quarter of the year stood at 2,794 according to Italian Ministry of Interior figures shared with UNHCR. This was more than a fivefold increase over the same period in 2019 (506). For the first two months of 2020, four of the top ten nationalities of arrival were West African, with Côte d'Ivoire ranking third with 283 arrivals, Guinea Conakry ranking sixth with 121, Mali ranking seventh with 115 and Nigeria ranking tenth with 70.

Further south, in the midst of the Covid-19 lockdown in Niger, some 256 people en route to Libya were left in the desert near the Niger/Libya border by the smugglers who had accompanied them. The group, which also included a baby, comprised many Nigerians (104), Ghanaians (53) and Burkinabés (34), among others. They were taken to Agadez where they were being hosted in the local stadium during a 14 day Covid-19 quarantine period. Fearing infection, the local population initially expressed reservations about this course of action, although these concerns were calmed somewhat by a subsequent understanding that those under quarantine are not allowed to leave the stadium during the period in which they may be contagious.[4]

Southbound mixed migration

Assisted movements to Niger

On 12 March, UNHCR evacuated 128 refugees from Libya to Niger through its Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM). The refugees hailed from Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. This brings the total of refugees and asylum seekers evacuated under the ETM since its inception in November 2017 to 3,208. As of the end of March, 2,454 of the ETM evacuees had left Niger for resettlement countries, and 799 remained in Niger. All operations were suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

At least two humanitarian charter flights organized by IOM returned Nigeriens from Libya to Niger during the first quarter of 2020. One such flight arrived in Niamey in early February carrying 116 people. Another flight later in the month returned 166 people to Niger.

Expulsions from Algeria

According to the NGO Alarme Phone Sahara (APS), approximately 1,282 people were expelled from Algeria into Niger in the month of January. This occurred in three batches: the first, on 16 January, comprising 396 non-Nigeriens; the second on 24 January comprising 440 non-Nigeriens; and the third, on 29 January, which took place through an official convoy comprising 446 Nigeriens. Whereas Nigerien citizens are removed from the country in organized convoys which are carried out in cooperation with the Nigerien government, non-Nigerien citizens are typically left near the border at a location known as Point Zero, and must walk to the nearest Nigerien town, a journey of 15-20 km through the desert. APS registered concern that following a decree from the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, deportation could further increase. Signed on 12 January, this order calls for the "repatriation of migrants residing illegally on the national

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4   Information from a 4Mi monitor in Agadez.

territory and those involved in begging networks."

Additionally, as of the end of March some 764 people expelled from Algeria in the previous weeks were being quarantined in Assamaka. The majority of these refoulés were from Niger (391), Mali (140) and Guinea Conakry (101), although 12 other nationalities were also represented. The group included vulnerable individuals including pregnant women, minors and injured persons. While numbers continue to evolve and may not be fully representative, as of the beginning of April figures from the World Health Organization showed Algeria with almost 10 times as many registered Covid-19 cases as Niger (1251 and 144 cases respectively on 6 April).

Given that reception and quarantine capacity is already stretched, and arrivals to the Algeria/Niger border continue, local authorities and IOM have identified an additional quarantine site in the town of Arlit, situated between Assamaka and Agadez. As of the end of March, IOM was supporting 2,371 stranded migrants across Niger in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, and indicated that its facilities in Niger were at full capacity. This is particularly worrying given that refugees and migrants continue to arrive in Niger but the pandemic and corresponding border closures have blocked onward repatriation through the organization's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program.

Agadez asylum seeker protests and aftermath

Sudanese asylum-seekers engaged in a sit-in outside of the UNHCR office in Agadez, Niger, for nearly three weeks from mid-December into early January, protesting the protracted nature of the asylum process and the difficult conditions in which they were living. Following a decision from the Nigerien High Court that the sit-in was illegal, on 4 January the protesters were forcefully dispersed. While reports of the incident itself and the events preceding it differ, some of the asylum-seekers reportedly started a fire in the camp. According to a UNHCR official, this destroyed 80% of the facility, although there were no reports of serious injuries resulting from the blaze. However, as of 30 January, some 196 people were still in custody of the 336 initially arrested following the sit-in and fire. Formal charges had been made against 61 of these people. Local reporting from late February indicates that of the 111 asylum seekers tried by the High Court of Agadez, two received a suspended prison sentence of one year, and 109 received a suspended prison sentence of six months for such violations as "unauthorized assembly" and "degradation of public buildings." While those remaining in the camp had been sleeping in improvised shelters, several weeks after the incident the government allowed UNHCR to bring in temporary shelters.

Thematic Focus: New Developments in Deterrence Along the Western Mediterranean Route[5]

Discussions of European externalization of migration policy often focus on measures taken in Niger and along the Central Mediterranean Route. However, actions taken along the Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) to keep refugees and migrants at arms' length from Europe should not be overlooked. In the first quarter of 2020 there were notable developments in European legal precedent and operational practice which served to deter migrants and refugees from EU borders. Both developments relate to non-mainland Spanish territories with proximity to the African continent, pertain to practices of physical removal from these territories, and disproportionately affect West Africans. They make it more difficult for West Africans to access due process, and by extension, to obtain protection and asylum.

The European Court of Human Rights and 'hot returns'

On 13 February, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) overturned the Court's previous ruling on a case brought by two asylum seekers, a Malian and an Ivoirien. The men had sought entrance to the Spanish enclave of Melilla in August of 2014, joining some [70](link) others in scaling the fences that surround the autonomous city which shares a land border with Morocco. After descending on the Spanish side of the fence, they were immediately turned over to Moroccan authorities and removed from Melilla back into Morocco. This is an example of the _devoluciones en caliente_ (hot returns) that Spain has carried out since 2005, a practice in which migrants and asylum seekers are returned to Morocco without any further process – and no opportunity to claim asylum – as soon as they set foot in the Spanish territories of Ceuta and Melilla. This policy has particularly affected people from sub-Saharan Africa. In October 2017 the ECHR unanimously ruled that the rights of these men had been _contravened_, as they had been subject to collective expulsion and had been denied an effective remedy, as they did not undergo an identity verification process, nor were they given access to translation or legal assistance.[6]

While the amount Spain was ordered to pay to the Malian and Ivoirien applicants was nominal – only €5,000 apiece – analysis in _El Pais_ suggests that Spain feared this could undermine its practice of hot returns, and that the ruling would set a bad precedent. Thus, the Spanish government asked that the case be reviewed by the Court's _Grand Chamber_, a request that was ultimately granted. The review and decision of the Grand Chamber hinged on the fact that the Malian and Ivoirien asylum seekers were considered to have used illegal and forceful means to try and enter Spanish territory, and had not availed themselves of any of the legitimate paths to achieve entry or seek asylum that the Spanish government alleged were available, including the possibility of crossing legally at the land border with Melilla or applying for asylum at a Spanish consulate. The _Spanish government_ argued that the applicants "had not demonstrated that

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5   This thematic focus contains excerpts from the article "_Hot returns" and the cold shoulder: New developments in deterrence along the Western Mediterranean Route_.

6   Article 4 Protocol 4 and Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights, respectively.

they had been unable to enter Spanish territory lawfully," an interpretation with which the Governments of Belgium, France and Italy concurred. Ultimately the Grand Chamber accepted this argument, reversing its previous decision and stating that the applicants' expulsion from Melilla without due process "was thus a consequence of their own conduct."

However, the effective availability of asylum procedures and options to legally access the territory of Melilla remains in question, and was a central element of the case for the applicants. They argued that in practice there was no access for sub-Saharan Africans to apply for asylum at the border between Morocco and Melilla, and this claim was supported by various third parties, including UN bodies and NGOs. The asylum office at Melilla's Beni Enzar border post was not established until after the events in question, and even after it was opened, Moroccan authorities systematically prevented sub-Saharan Africans from reaching it, according to the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, UNHCR and various NGOs focused on the rights of refugees and migrants. Various legal experts and scholars have warned that this ruling opens the door for European states to take a more expansive approach to expulsions, and that it could lead to refoulement. The judgement of the Grand Chamber is final and cannot be appealed.

Deportations from Canary Islands to Mauritania... and on to Mali...

On another frontier of the Western Mediterranean Route, boat arrivals of refugees and migrants to the Spanish-held Canary Islands have been increasing over the last months[7]. According to Frontex, the Canary Islands were the EU border with the largest percentage increase in migration seen in 2019. Although absolute numbers for the year were still relatively low, at some 2,700, more than half of these arrivals occurred in the final quarter of the year. Against this backdrop, the Spanish government has stepped up measures to expel people who arrive there irregularly through deportation flights to Mauritania carried out with the support of Frontex. While these flights have occurred previously, their frequency has significantly increased, with nine flights carried out from mid-2019 through the third week of March 2020, as compared to four flights in 2018. Additionally, greater scrutiny is being paid to the potential for indirect refoulement that they pose, and to the sufficiency of the legal safeguards that surround these operations.

A number of concerns have been raised in relation to these operations, both by those who have undergone the deportation process and by organizations seeking to safeguard the rights of refugees and migrants. Officials from the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture noted "irregularities" in the January flights. These included failure to adequately screen for potential minors among the deportees; substantial and "intimidating" security presence; and issues related to the medical documentation that should ensure that all those on the flights were "fit to travel." Deportees also point to a lack of accessible information about what would befall them. They cite an absence of translation, limited access to legal aid and the short notice they were given before the deportation took place. In line with the overall gaps in communication and information sharing, some have stated explicitly that they were not told about the option to apply for asylum, which could have halted their expulsion.

Issues related to inadequate communication, advice and screening processes for returnees gain a further worrying dimension given the composition of recent flights. In three flights occurring in the first two months

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7   For more on this phenomenon, see the Mixed Migration Centre's Quarterly Mixed Migration Update West Africa, Quarter 4 2019, Thematic focus: Atlantic departures and Canary Island arrivals.

of the year (20 and 27 January, 17 February) 139 people were deported to Mauritania. Of these, only eight were Mauritanian, and 108 were from Mali, with the remainder from other West and Central African nations including Gabon, Ivory Coast and Senegal. Migrants and refugees expelled from the Canary Islands under these operations are flown to Nouadhibou in northwest Mauritania and then brought directly to the Mali and Senegalese borders where they are handed over to local authorities. This is concerning in it itself, but particularly so given the preponderance of Malians among those deported, and the prevailing UNHCR Position on Returns to Mali (Update II) which calls on states to refrain from forcibly returning Malians originating from a variety of administrative locations within the country.

The Spanish Minister of the Interior maintains that the flights comply with international norms as "they are not going to Mali, but to Mauritania." However, the spokesperson for the Canary Islands government has stated that they do not really know whether deportees from Mali will be returned to their country once they reach Nouadhibou, and Mauritanian security officials have confirmed that this is indeed what occurs. The Spanish government has also claimed that the expulsion flights are legal because Malians are given the chance to apply for asylum, but this does not seem to align with the experiences described above.

Pieces of a larger pattern

Taken separately, both the decision of the ECHR Grand Chamber and the implementation of deportation flights from the Canary Islands to Mauritania highlight circumstances in which the rights of refugees and migrants may be undermined. Taken together, they are further pieces in a larger pattern of deterrence that European countries and the EU more broadly have been creating over many years.

Highlighted New Research and Reports
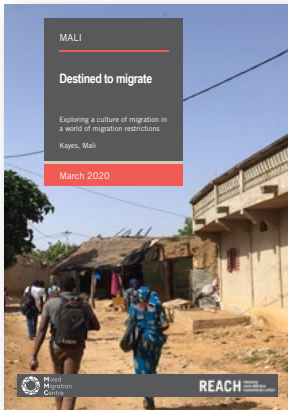
Destined to Migrate: Exploring a culture of migration in a world of migration restrictions – Kayes, Mali

REACH and Mixed Migration Centre | March 2020

Based on 110 individual interviews with potential migrants and community members in Kayes, Mali, and complemented by focus group discussions and key informant interviews (reaching an additional 35 people), this study documents the prevailing "culture of migration" in the Kayes region of Mali. While focusing on how this "culture" is manifest in the present day, the report is grounded in a historical examination of migration out of the region, particularly to France. The study specifically seeks to gauge how increasingly restrictive European migration policies have impacted aspirations to migrate and decisions about migration routes and destinations in a region where migration is considered to be a crucial rite of passage and livelihood strategy, and where communities expect their young men to migrate. It also examines the effects of migration information and sensitization campaigns in such a context. The report finds that in spite of increased difficulty in reaching Europe or living there in a regular manner, community expectations and individual aspirations towards migration remain very strong, and that information campaigns play a limited role in this context. It concludes that these tighter policies have disrupted historical patterns of circular migration, and that they have increased the vulnerability of migrants themselves and of their families back in Kayes.

From Imposing to Engaging: African Civil Society Perspectives on EU Africa Cooperation

European Council on Refugees and Exiles | February 2020

This working paper series facilitated by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) brings together expertise from African civil society actors working on the issue of migration. It seeks to highlight the consequences and challenges that European migration policy leads to in the African countries where it plays out, underscoring the many ways this policy can be counterproductive. It also suggests policy alternatives that could lead to more mutually beneficial outcomes. Among contributions from across the African continent, the series includes papers on the "*Contribution de la Société Civile à la Coopération Union Européene-Afrique en Matière de Migration*" (Civil Society Input to EU-Africa Cooperation on Migration) from Senegal (Migrafrique) and Niger (Caritas Développement Niger). The paper looking at the case of Niger notes the influence the EU is able to wield by using development aid to pursue its migration objectives, even when these may exacerbate insecurity and impede free movement while failing to address structural causes of poverty and inequality. The paper examining the case of Senegal echoes concerns about regional freedom of movement, and highlights the challenges posed by European visa restrictions and the consequences these have on migration for employment, education and family reasons.

Managing Trafficking[8] in Norther Niger / Garder le trafic sous contrôle dans le Nord du Niger

International Crisis Group | January 2020

This report traces the recent history of the transport of migrants and refugees in Niger, and the crucial role that this has played in the economy of northern Niger. Inextricably linked to formal government structures, the report also explores how the Nigerien state has managed this trade, and the accommodations it has reached with traffickers. The report identifies the establishment of Law 2015-36, which criminalized the transport of refugees and migrants, and greatly reduced the numbers in transit through Niger, as a turning point in the government's approach; one with quite negative economic consequences for the economy of northern Niger. The analysis also places the evolving phenomenon of trafficking of people alongside other unfolding phenomena in Niger, such as changing patterns of drug trafficking with an increasing risk of associated violence; new gold discoveries both helping to absorb some unemployed smugglers and leading to banditry; and international intervention in Niger, ostensibly with counter-terrorism objectives, but with potential for mission creep. The report highlights the strain these phenomena have placed on the strategies used by the Nigerien government to manage illicit economies while minimizing violence. It concludes that while these strategies are risky, their collapse could be even more dangerous. The report closes with recommendations that would seek to avoid such an outcome.

What happens to migrants who are sent back? I spent a year following 12 people to find out

The Correspondent | January 2020

Incorporating their own words and photographs they have taken themselves, this long-form article follows twelve returned Nigerian migrants for a year, providing an in-depth look at their day to day lives and reintegration processes. While based in the deeply personal experience of these returned migrants, this article also looks at the institutional side of return and reintegration. Since 2017 the EU has returned almost 16,000 people from Libya to Nigeria. The program to support their reintegration kicked off with minimal preparation due to the urgency of getting migrants and refugees out of the crisis situation they faced in Libya. The returnees profiled here seemed to benefit from some elements of the program, particularly the reintegration course with its focus on psycho-social support and business skills training. However, other elements were less straightforward in their utility. The support for small business development the returnees received was hampered by bureaucratic red-tape, a requirement for collective business projects, and an insistence on in-kind rather than cash support. The latter condition reflects the EU's fear that if returnees receive cash, they will use this to make another migration attempt towards Europe.

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8   The term trafficking used in the report "as a catch-all term to refer to the illicit transport of drugs, gold and people, in reflection of common usage on the ground and in the French language."
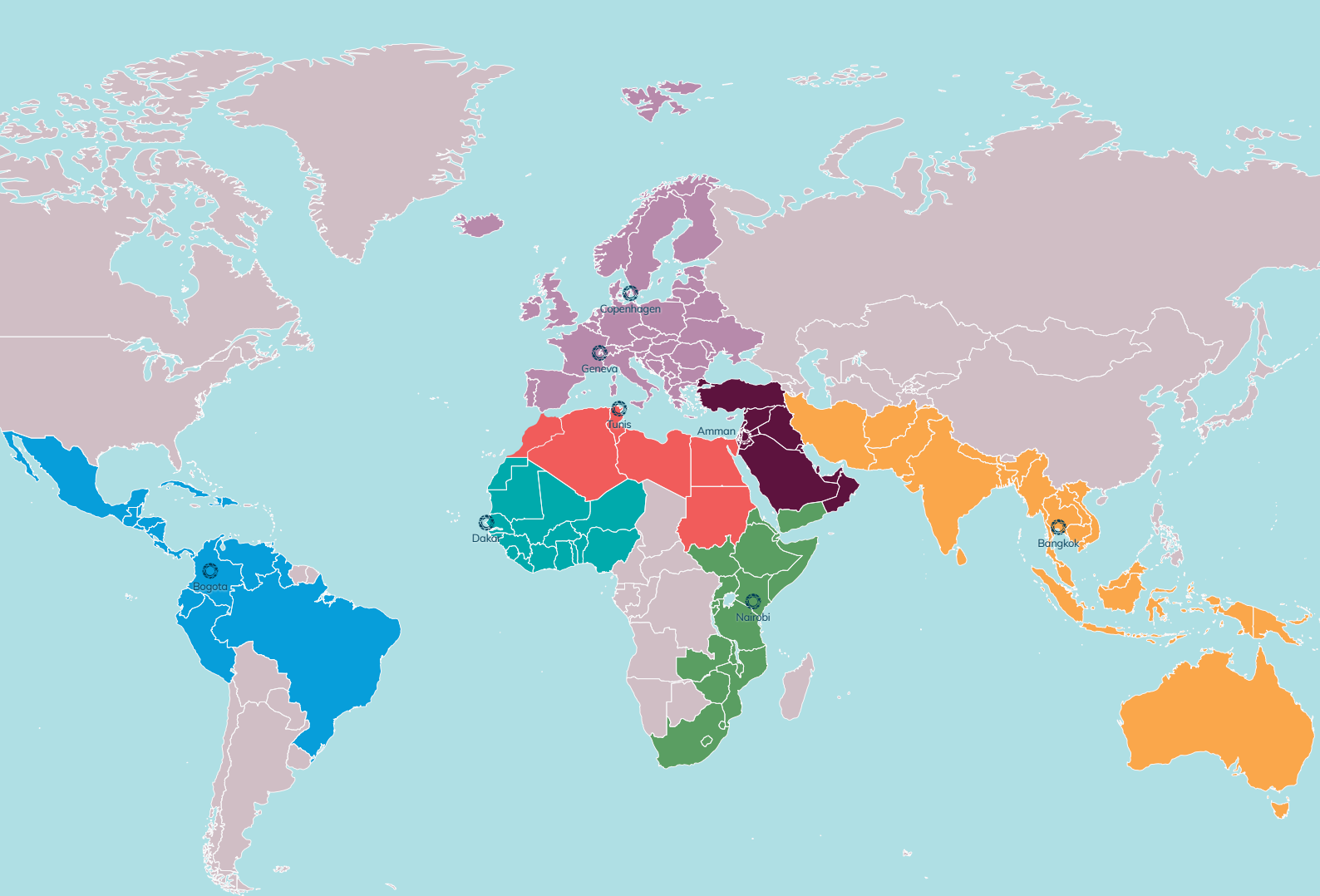
The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

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