



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 six 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](https://twitter.com/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.

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Jean-Baptiste Joire (2017)

Women watching boats in Joal-Fadiout, Senegal, February 2017.

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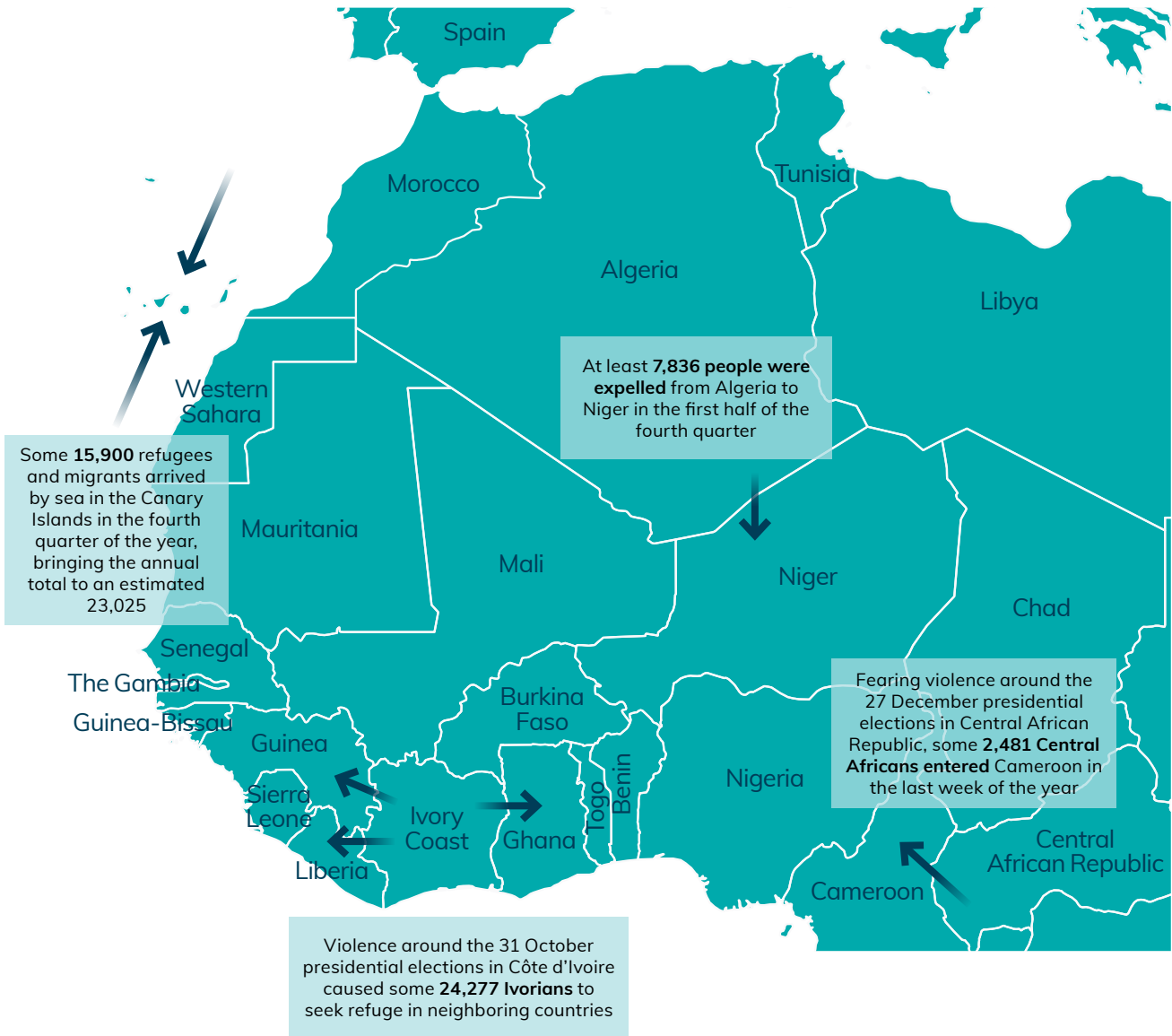
Quarter 4 - 2020

Key Updates

- **Algeria expulsions to Niger:** According to NGO Alarme Phone Sahara, at least 7,836 people were expelled from Algeria to Niger in a series of convoys, both official and unofficial, taking place over the course of the month of [October](#) and in [mid-November](#). The [UNHCR Special Envoy](#) for the Western & Central Mediterranean qualified these collective expulsions as “contrary to international law.”
- **Canary Islands arrivals:** Some 15,900 refugees and migrants arrived to the Canary Islands by sea from October-December,¹ a figure more than double the total for the rest of the year combined (approximately [6,135](#) arrivals from January-September), bringing the total arrivals for 2020 to an estimated [23,025](#).
- **Côte d'Ivoire election displacement:** Tensions, clashes and the fear of further [violence](#) surrounding the [31 October](#) presidential elections in **Côte d'Ivoire** had caused some [24,277 Ivorians](#) to seek refuge in neighboring countries as of the year's end. The majority were being hosted in **Liberia** (23,075), of whom more than 60% are children and 25% are women.
- **Burkina Faso IDPs:** Numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in **Burkina Faso**, which had seen substantial increases in each previous quarter in 2020, plateaued in the fourth quarter. However, according to UNHCR the year saw the numbers of IDPs in Burkina Faso almost double, from [560,033](#) in December of 2019 to [1,074,933](#) as of 31 December 2020.

1 According to a compilation of UNHCR's [Spain Weekly Snapshots](#) (28 September – 27 December)

Regional Overview*



*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 spite of continuing [banditry and violence](#) by non-state armed groups in the states of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara in northwestern **Nigeria**, as well as cross-border incursions into the Maradi region of **Niger**, UNHCR did not report new cross-border movements in the fourth quarter. As of November 2020, [UNHCR](#) estimated that over 70,000 Nigerians had sought refuge in Maradi since September 2018 (with 41,358 biometrically registered as of early November), and that over 17,262 Nigeriens had been displaced internally. Due to the prevailing insecurity, as of mid-December, [10,447 refugees](#) had been assisted by UNHCR to move to locations further away from the border.

In the Diffa region of Niger, which plays host to 265,000 forcibly displaced people, a 12 December [attack](#) by Boko Haram on the town of Toumour killed 28 people and injured hundreds. Just 14 kilometers from the border with Nigeria, Toumour hosts approximately 20,000 Nigerian refugees, as well as 8,300 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 3,600 returnees.

Numbers of internally displaced persons in **Burkina Faso**, which had seen [substantial increases](#) in each [previous quarter](#) in 2020, plateaued in the fourth quarter. As of 31 December, they stood at [1,074,933](#), according to UNHCR. The year as a whole saw the numbers of IDPs in Burkina Faso almost double, from [560,033](#) in December of 2019.

The security situation in the Burkina Faso remained unstable, and on 4 October, IDPs traveling in a convoy were [attacked](#) by an armed group as they sought to return to their homes from the town of Pissila in the Centre-Nord region. Of the 46 IDPs, 25 men were killed and one seriously injured, while women and children were let go.

In December, some [3,000 refugees](#) from **Mali** were assisted by UNHCR to relocate from the town of Dori to Goudoubo camp in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso. They had been driven out of the camp earlier in the year following a string of violent incursions into the camp and returned following an increase in security patrols and personnel at the camp. These 3,000 refugees are expected to be joined by an additional 2,100 refugees coming from the Mentao camp, which had been cut off from aid for more than a year following a series of deadly attacks.

Tensions, clashes and the fear of further [violence](#) surrounding the [31 October](#) presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire had caused some [24,277 Ivorians](#) to seek refuge in neighboring countries as of the year's end. While relatively small numbers had gone to **Togo** (36), **Guinea** (387) and **Ghana** (779), the majority were being hosted in **Liberia** (23,075). According to UNHCR, of the Ivorian refugees in Liberia, more than 60% are children and 25% are women.

The December 27 elections (presidential and legislative) in **Central African Republic** also led to cross-border displacement. Fearing violence related to the elections, some [2,481 Central Africans](#) were able to enter Cameroon, despite the closure of the border during that week.

Policy updates

On November 18, a charter flight carried [19 deportees](#) from Germany back to **The Gambia**. While there had been individual Gambians deported on commercial flights in the interim, this was the first deportation from Germany by charter flight since the Gambian government declared a [moratorium](#) on deportations in March of 2019 following public protest. Although in principle the moratorium had been lifted in January 2020 at the request of the German government and European Union, a planned charter deportation in [September](#) was cancelled, underscoring the [sensitivity](#) of the issue in terms of domestic politics in the Gambia.

In December, three fathers in **Senegal** were sentenced to two years in prison, charged with “endangering the life of others” after sending their sons on an attempted journey to the Canary Islands in a pirogue which resulted in the death of one. An initial charge of “[complicity in migrant trafficking](#)” was ultimately dropped. While this trial marks the first time that the Senegalese government has [targeted](#) the families of prospective migrants, it is in line with public positions of the Senegalese government following a [shipwreck](#) off the coast of Senegal in October in which at least 140 lost their lives.

At the end of October, the Senegalese Minister of Community Development and Social Equity [appealed](#) to the president to “put an end to the phenomenon,” calling for the practice to be “criminalized and the smugglers and organizers severely punished.” In late November, the Minister of Youth had strong language related to the role of families and social pressure in pushing young people to migrate, calling for families to stop the “[unbearable pressure](#)” they put on their children.

However, the Director of the [Senegalese Migration Observatory](#) calls into question this new approach by the government, saying “It is not a trial against parents that will raise awareness among the population. Rather, we should try to understand the root causes and provide an answer.” He went on to say that “The logic of security has already sufficiently shown its limits.”

Mixed migration from West Africa towards North Africa and Europe²

Western Mediterranean Route

Irregular arrivals to Spain by land (Ceuta and Melilla) and sea (Spanish mainland, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands, Ceuta and Melilla) stood at [41,681](#) for 2020, according to UNHCR. This was a 29% increase over 2019. As of the end of September, four West African countries were represented among the top nationalities of arrivals: Malians (13%), Guineans (8%), Ivorians (7%), Senegalese (5%).

More than half of these arrivals – an estimated [23,025](#) – were to the Canary Islands. While the trend in arrivals to the Canary Islands had been on the rise throughout the year, the fourth quarter saw by far the biggest spike. According to a compilation of UNHCR's [Spain Weekly Snapshots](#) (28 September – 27 December), some 15,900 refugees and migrants arrived to the Canary Islands by sea from October-December, a figure more than double the total for the rest of the year combined (approximately [6,135](#) arrivals from January-September). While the Spanish government does not make official [nationality](#) figures available, these refugees and migrants came [predominantly](#) from Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia, but also other countries such as Mali and Guinea-Conakry.

Characterized by a dangerous boat journey which can last more than a week, there have been multiple reports of migrant and refugee deaths at sea. In October, [at least 140 persons](#) died off the coast of Senegal after their boat, bound for the Canary Islands, caught fire. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that from 1 January – 15 November 2020, some [41 shipwrecks](#) occurred along this route, as well as 511 deaths. However, it also emphasizes that shipwrecks often are not reported, and these numbers are likely to be an underestimate.

Following the sea journey, aid organizations have [reported](#) that migrants and refugees travelling to the Canary Islands have had to endure squalid living conditions at the Arguineguin pier on the Canary Islands, as well as insufficient access to legal support and detainment beyond the 72 hours that is legally allowed. At the end of November 2020, the final 830 migrants were removed from this dock at the southwest of Gran Canaria Island, which aid organizations had begun to call the "[camp of shame](#)." The majority of arrivals since late [August](#) passed through the dock, and at its height in November it housed over [2,500 persons](#) although it had been intended for 400.

UNHCR and IOM carried out a [joint monitoring mission](#) to the Canary Islands in November, and may [increase](#) operations there in the course of 2021. Additionally, the Canary Islands have opened [21 emergency centers](#) meant to house unaccompanied children. However, aid organizations have also indicated the current support provided is not enough to meet their needs.

² Numbers in this section reflect best estimates available at time data was accessed (late January) but figures may be subject to later updates.

Central Mediterranean Route

According to [UNHCR](#), 34,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy by sea in 2020. This is almost three times the number of irregular sea arrivals recorded in 2019 (11,471). Nationals of Côte d'Ivoire comprised 6% of total arrivals; this was the only West African country among the top ten nationalities of arrival (behind Tunisians and Bangladeshis)

Southbound mixed migration

International activities and populations of interest in Niger

Following the resumption of [onward resettlement](#) to third countries from Niger in the third quarter of the year, evacuation flights from Libya to Niger under UNHCR's Emergency Transit Mechanism restarted in October after a seven-month pandemic-related suspension. On 15 October a group of [153 refugees and asylum-seekers](#) were evacuated from Libya to Niger under strict pandemic protocols. The group was comprised of people from Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, and included 16 families and 15 minors. As of 5 December, [694 evacuees](#) under the ETM remained in Niamey.

According to Alarme Phone Sahara, on 8 October a [protest](#) took place at a UNHCR site in Hamdallaye, Niger. The refugees and asylum seekers at the site said they had been without food for three days, and engaged in a peaceful protest calling for justice for refugees in Niger.

Assisted Voluntary Return operations carried out by IOM continued in the fourth quarter following pandemic-related suspensions and slowdowns earlier in the year. These included the return of [105 Nigeriens](#) from Chad on 1 October and the return of [99 Sierra Leoneans](#) from Niger on 15 October. November saw the return of several groups of [Maliens](#) from Niger, including the first charter flight in 2020 departing directly from [Agadez](#).

Expulsions from Algeria to Niger

The fourth quarter of 2020 has been particularly marked by expulsions from Algeria into Niger, on the heels of a declaration by the Algerian Minister of the Interior of a new "[national strategy](#)" to combat illegal migration.

The NGO Alarme Phone Sahara estimated that from 30 September through the end of October, some [6,747 people](#) had been deported. These comprised five "official" convoys, largely composed of Nigeriens (3,880 people), and four "unofficial convoys" of non-Nigeriens (2,867 people). Whereas official convoys take people to the border post in Assamaka, Niger, unofficial convoys leave people in the desert border area, obliging them to walk 15-20 kilometers through to Assamaka. The largest nationality groups represented in the October unofficial convoys were Maliens (1,004) and Guineans (708).

Alarme Phone Sahara also testified to the expulsion of at least [1,089 people](#) from 12-14 November. This included 445 people deported in an unofficial convoy and 644 Nigerien citizens in an official convoy. The latter group included 144 minors. Following the 445 expulsions on 12 November, the [UNHCR Special](#)

[Envoy](#) for the Western & Central Mediterranean situation highlighted his concern, emphasizing that “Migrants and asylum seekers receive the same arbitrary fate. These collective expulsions remain contrary to international law.”

As of October 9, [Human Rights Watch](#) estimated that Algeria had already expelled more than 16,000 people to Niger over the course of the year. They raised concerns about a wave of mass arrests of refugees and migrants taking place in Algeria from the beginning of September, highlighting that children had been separated from their families, people’s belongings had been taken, and the arrests included asylum seekers, some of who were subsequently expelled. According to [Human Rights Watch](#), “Algeria is entitled to protect its borders, but not to arbitrarily detain and collectively expel migrants, including children and asylum seekers, without a trace of due process. Before moving to deport anyone, authorities should verify their immigration or asylum status individually and ensure individual court reviews.”

Thematic Focus: Exploring migration motivations of West Africans taking the Atlantic route³

A recent study carried out by the MMC West Africa sought to better understand the dynamics of the Atlantic route towards the Canary Islands, including people's motivations for taking the route. Respondents typically had multiple motivations, almost always grounded in familiar drivers, such as poverty and the need to provide for one's family, but at times influenced by considerations related to the pandemic, the perceived directness of the route, and/or the example or encouragement of friends and family.

This research is based on interviews with 46 refugees and migrants (referred to below as respondents) and 16 key informants in the Canary Islands, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal from 12 November to 17 December 2020. Of the 46 respondents interviewed, 52% were from Senegal (n=24) and 39% were from Mali (n=18), with one respondent each from Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia and Guinea (Conakry). In keeping with the profile of the route itself, respondents were overwhelmingly young and male (44 men, 2 women).

Economic and social pressures

The refugees and migrants interviewed overwhelmingly highlighted the underlying structural factors that influenced their decision to migrate – poverty and lack of opportunity, societal and family expectations, the need to provide. Thirty-seven of the 46 total respondents referenced economic and livelihood reasons when they spoke of motivations for departure, and 32 respondents spoke of the need to support their families.

Specifically, respondents described their desire to escape poverty and to strive for greater economic security, with inability to secure fruitful employment or a sustainable livelihood very frequently referenced as a main driver in their migration decision. As one respondent, a 40-year old Gambian, put it, *“Yes, I am trying to migrate to the Canary Islands because I want to help my family. I have tried all types of work and nothing works as I have seen that the people who have gone to Europe have all succeeded and are living a good life.”*

However, this motivation was frequently shaded by cultural factors, such as the need to support one's family or the need for financial security to achieve socially mandated indicators of success and/or adulthood, such as a house or marriage. Related to these are the desire to attain status and avoid stigma, often informed by the examples of others who have migrated successfully. All of this is underlaid by conceptions and expectations of masculinity in the West African context. These complex socio-cultural imperatives are exemplified by the respondent from the Gambia, who said:

³ This thematic focus is based on condensed excerpts from a forthcoming MMC study on the Atlantic route.

“Someone who has nothing will not be considered,” going on to describe how he migrated to “escape poverty, stigmatization, to have something of my own such as a well-built house, a vehicle, to build a better future for me and my family, to no longer ask the next of kin, to be independent of other people because here, I am seen as a jinxed but poor person who cannot provide for the needs of relatives.”

Covid-19 and motivations

Some prevailing theories related to the impact of Covid-19 – such as [border closures](#) blocking access on other routes or a hiatus in deportations from the Canary Islands serving as a pull factor – were not supported by this research. However, several key informants spoke specifically of economic hardship and a prevailing rumor that Covid deaths in Europe would increase labor demand. While this was not a major emphasis for refugee and migrant respondents, nonetheless several did mention both factors.

Three respondents, all of whom had lived in Mauritania prior to departure, drew an explicit linkage between Covid’s negative impact on their livelihoods and a desire to attempt migration to the Canary Islands. One stated *“I had been working in Mauritania for 2 years, with the situation of Covid 19, my activities stopped, I stayed 2 months without paying my rent, nor sending to my parents in Mali, who were in need, my mother became ill, but I had no possibility to support her care; it was after the accumulation of all these problems, that I told myself to find solutions, to change this.”*

Three Senegalese respondents all spoke of their perception that the pandemic’s impact in Europe made it more likely for them to find work. For instance, according to one, *“the pandemic motivated us to leave, because there are many deaths in Europe, so I was convinced that if we left, with this situation in Europe, we would easily find work.”*

The role of information and example

Challenges that make other routes less hospitable or feasible – such as conflict in the Central Sahel or the situation in Libya – were mentioned by several key informants, but rarely explicitly by respondents. Rather, respondents perceived that the route was a relatively short and direct entry point to Europe. Twelve respondents made statements to this effect. According to a 24-year-old Malian interviewed in Mauritania, *“I decided to go to the Canary Islands because according to what my friends told me the Canary Islands is the easiest and fastest way to reach Europe.”*

In general, information from friends, and their implicit example, also appeared to be a powerful motivating force, both in driving the desire to migrate in general, and in motivating people to take the Atlantic route in particular. Seventeen respondents spoke of receiving information about the route from friends, family members or other acquaintances, with 12 stating friends provided them with information or indicating that witnessing such friends’ migration journeys served as a source of information or inspiration. Key informants emphasized the power of such influences, both in spurring people to attempt the Atlantic route, and at the same time, in making them less likely to internalize negative information about the route. According to a key informant interviewed in Mauritania:

“You've seen the boats sinking. Those who are back or who have not been able to go or who have been taken to shore, those who have been found halfway, all of them say that it was pressure. That there were friends, family who told them that they had to leave, that there was a need for manpower. They are told that they are young and that they must try their luck, but they are not really told what is going on.... We're trying to raise awareness among those who haven't left yet. They tell us 'you don't understand, those who are there, what they are telling us, that's the reality!'.”⁴

Although respondents did not frequently refer to macro-level factors, such as the blockage of other routes to Europe, when discussing their decision to choose the Atlantic route, this does not necessarily mean such factors are invalid. Rather respondents felt micro-level factors, such as other migrants' stories of success or the need to provide for their family, much more profoundly in their lives and in their decision-making process. As a result, these individual-level factors were likely better understood by respondents and thus served as their focus. It is also possible that macro-level factors decreased in importance as people began to see more and more peers and acquaintances try for the Canary Islands, and the route began to generate its own momentum.

4 Interview with key informant in Mauritania, 20 November 2020.

Highlighted New Research and Reports



[MENTORING RETURNEES: Study on Reintegration Outcomes Through a Comparative Lens](#)

[ACCOMPAGNER LA REINTEGRATION: Etude sur les résultats de la réintégration à travers une analyse comparative](#)

Samuel Hall and IOM | October 2020

This report analyses the economic, social and psycho-social outcomes of IOM's returnees' reintegration processes in three countries (Guinea, Morocco, and Senegal) in which fieldwork was carried out. It also incorporates analysis of data across 14 additional countries. The study seeks to measure reintegration outcomes, including gaps and needs; analyze the extent to which mentoring makes a difference to reintegration; and identify good practices for effective reintegration activities. The study finds that, among other things: the migration experience affects what happens post return; economic, social and psychological assistance are all essential components for successful reintegration; and mentoring can have a positive effect on returnees' reintegration, but the approach can be further strengthened. The paper concluded with a series of recommendations on how its findings can be translated into more effective programming, network-building, communication, documentation and advocacy.



[When the dust settles: Economic and governance repercussions of migration policies in Niger's north](#)

Clingendael Institute | October 2020

This research paper explores the impact of migration policies on Niger. It is based on interviews with key informants in Agadez, carried out between May 2019 and June 2020. The first section of the report examines the construction of a 'migration paradigm' and the effects of policies of migration control in Niger's northern region. It analyzes the challenges these policies have posed for a region which had historically gained important livelihoods benefits from mobility. The second section focuses on the longer term impacts of these migration policies by examining key economic factors in the region (human smuggling, smuggling of goods, gold mining and small-scale businesses); perceptions and positioning of local leaders, particularly traditional authorities; and finally, the region's conflict management resources. The paper ends with a series of recommendations to the EU and its members, as well as to organizations implementing projects in the Agadez region.

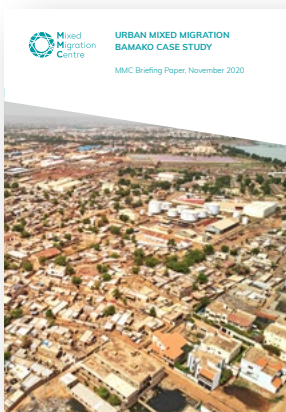


[A Sharper Lens on Vulnerability \(West Africa\): A statistical analysis of the determinants of protection incidents among refugees and migrants in West Africa](#)

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) - West Africa | November 2020

Migrant vulnerability is increasingly used as a lens for analysis as well as an operational category for leading migrant- and refugee-serving organizations. This report seeks to enrich this concept through a quantitative evidence base.

Drawing on a database of over 10,000 refugee and migrant interviews in West Africa from the MMC's 4Mi initiative, this study examines the factors which influence migrants' and refugees' vulnerability to certain protection incidents during their migration journey, namely: death, detention, extortion, kidnapping, physical abuse, robbery and sexual assault and harassment. Through statistical analysis, the report examined the extent to which gender, country of origin, language, smuggler use, stopping to work en route, intended destination and route taken influenced migrants' likelihood of experiencing protection incidents.



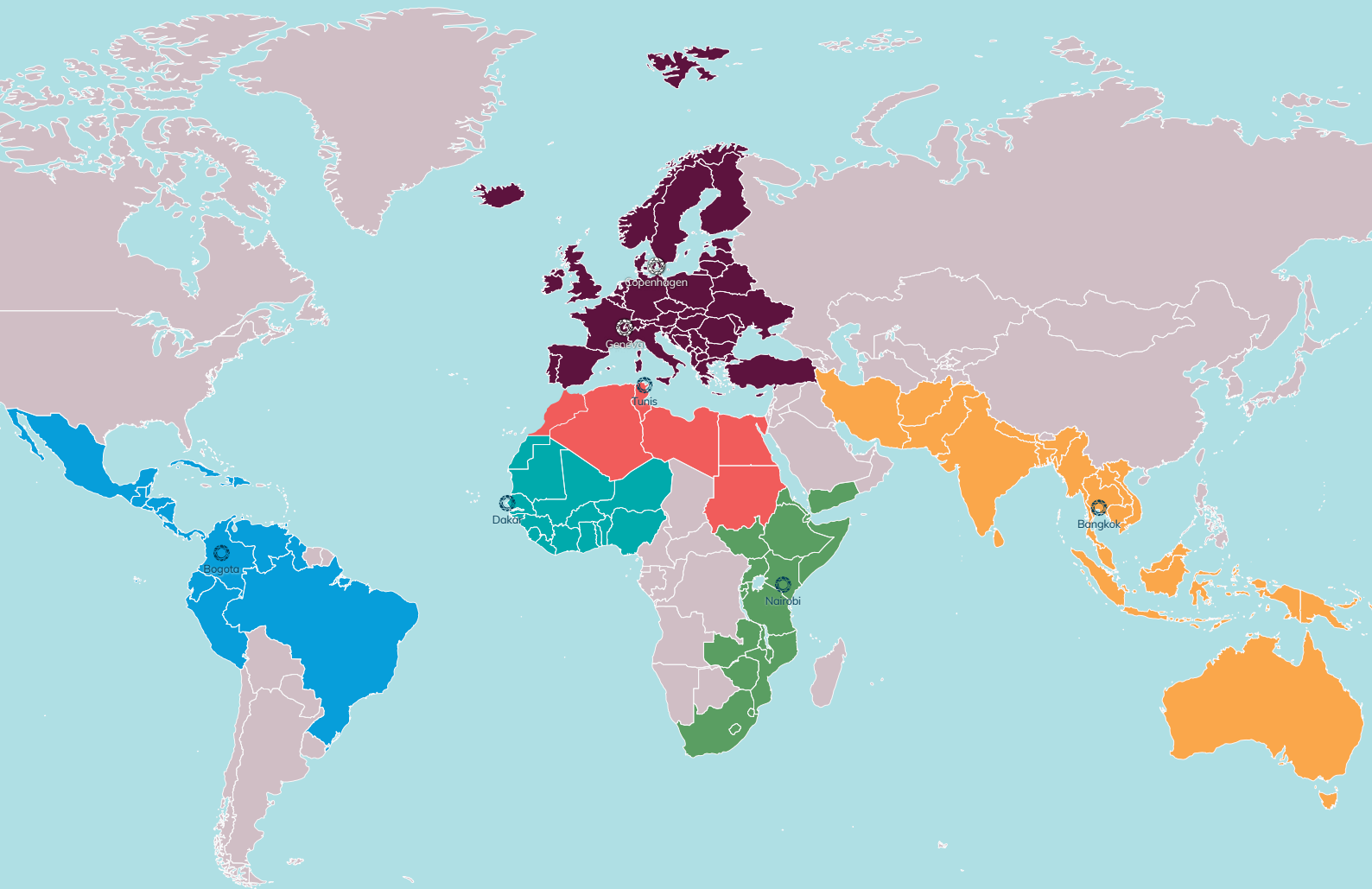
[Urban Mixed Migration Bamako Case Study](#)

[Migration Mixte en Milieu Urbain – Etude de Cas sur Bamako](#)

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) - West Africa | November 2020

This briefing paper examines the migration dynamics within Bamako, a migration hub in Mali which is an important city of transit, destination and return for migrants and refugees in West Africa. It specifically investigates the experiences of migrants and refugees through three lenses: the Covid-19 pandemic, Bamako as a city of opportunity and Bamako as a city of risks.

Drawing on key informant interviews and surveys conducted as part of the 4Mi initiative, the report found that a favorable exchange rate between Mali and its neighboring countries, a wide and strong network of service providers serving migrants and refugees, and the existence of remittance-sending diaspora networks which provide important financial inflows to Bamako and Mali more broadly lend credence to Bamako as a city of opportunities. Bamako was also seen to hold risks for people on the move. While extortion appears common, socioeconomic risks were emphasized above all. Roughly half of the respondents had chosen to prolong their stay in Bamako due to the pandemic, and the majority expressed that they could access health services if they exhibited Covid-19 symptoms.



The MMC is a global network consisting of six 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 Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

For more information visit:

mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

