



# 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](https://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.

#### **Front cover photo credit:**

Jean-Baptiste Joire (2017)

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

# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: West Africa

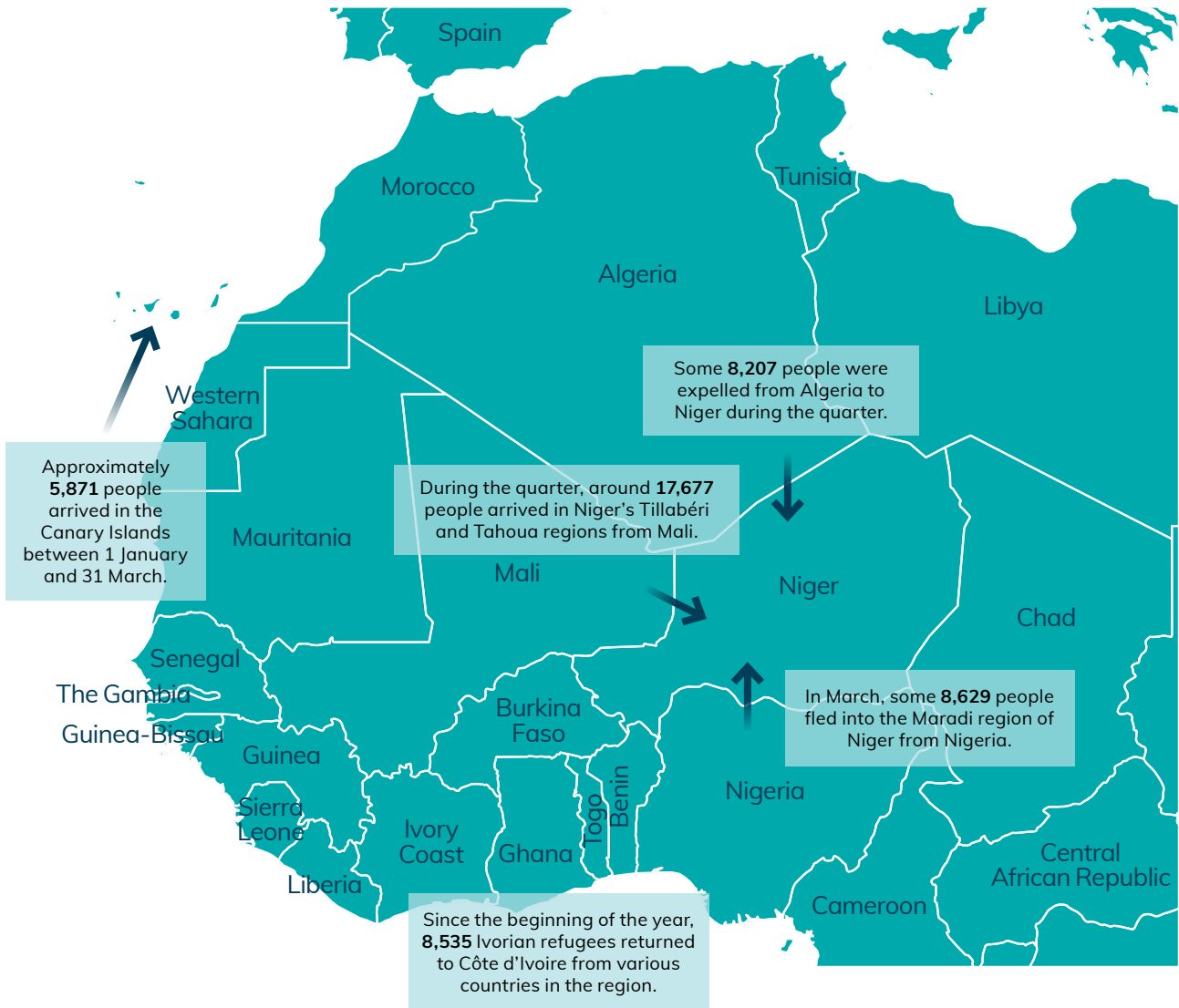
## Quarter 1 - 2022

### Key Updates

- **High-level visits to Niger:** In February, Niger received visits from the [Director General of IOM and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#), and in a separate mission, the [EU Commissioner for Home Affairs](#). Both delegations met with the president and other high-ranking government officials and made site visits, including to Agadez.
- **Anti-smuggling operation in Niger:** In January, the Nigerien police arrested approximately [twenty people](#) in Niamey and Maradi in connection to smuggling of migrants. They were implicated in document fraud and the organization of plane transport to Europe using these false documents
- **Senegal FRONTEX proposal:** During a visit to Senegal by a delegation from the EU, the Commissioner for Home Affairs proposed an operational deployment of [Frontex](#) to Senegal. Should the Senegalese government accept the EU's offer, it would be the first time Frontex would operate outside of Europe with its own personnel. Senegal's Interior Minister has agreed to undertake "[technical discussions](#)" on the offer.
- **Cross borders movements and internal displacement continue unabated in the region:** In the first quarter, some [17,677 people](#) entered **Niger's** western regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua from **Mali**. During the month of March, ongoing violence and banditry in northwestern **Nigeria** drove around [8,629 people](#) into the Maradi region of **Niger**. In **Burkina Faso** the first quarter of the year saw the second biggest spike in internal displacement since the beginning of conflict there, with [160,000 people displaced](#) in January alone.
- **Canary Islands arrivals:** There was an increase in irregular arrivals to [Spain](#) in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the corresponding period of 2021. The majority of these were to the Canary Islands, which as of 31 March had documented [5,871](#) arrivals, a 71% increase over the first quarter of 2021.
- **Expulsions into Niger:** Based on figures from the NGO Alarme Phone Sahara, some 8,207 people were expelled from Algeria to Niger in the first quarter of the year.<sup>1</sup> While exact numbers are not clear, hundreds of people were also expelled from [Libya](#) into Niger during this period.

1 Total calculated based on figures found on the Alarme Phone Sahara website: "[January to March 2022: Mass deportations from Algeria and Libya to Niger](#)" and "[March 2022: Arrival of further deportation convoys. Precarious situation in Assamaka and in the cities of Niger.](#)"

## 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

According to [UNHCR](#), approximately 7,000 people from **Burkina Faso** had crossed into north-western Côte d'Ivoire between May 2021 and February 2022, at which point numbers were averaging around 100 people crossing each day. Overall, 2021 saw a 50% increase in cross border displacement of Burkinabè compared to 2021, with some 19,200 entering Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger. As of early February 2022, the region hosts more than 34,000 Burkinabè refugees.

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Burkina Faso stood at [1,814,283](#) at the end of February, a [14% increase](#) since the beginning of 2022. This was driven by the registered displacement of more than [160,000 people](#) in January alone, which aid organizations have called the “second biggest spike in displacement since [the] crisis began,” warning of inadequate resources to respond as humanitarian funds are concentrated on Ukraine.

According to MMC key informants a slight decrease in migration flows was observed between eastern Burkina Faso and **Niger** in the middle of March. This followed an [attack](#) on a transport STM bus by non-state armed actors in Fono, Niger on 16 March. In searching for police who were traveling on the bus, these actors killed at least 19 people and burned the bus. While other companies continued to use this route, la Compagnie de Transport STM suspended its operations. Reduced flows are likely due to this suspension and to the perception on the part of refugees and migrants that the route is very dangerous.

Some [17,677 people](#) entered Niger's western regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua from **Mali** following violence between various armed groups in March. The displaced were comprised of Nigerien returnees and Malian refugees; [UNHCR](#) has stated that 2,245 of the latter arrived in Tillabéri and 9,384 arrived in Tahoua during the quarter.

In the month of March, some [8,629 people](#) from **Nigeria** crossed into the Maradi region of Niger to escape ongoing violence and banditry in northwestern Nigeria. The Maradi region was already hosting at least 80,000 Nigerian refugees, primarily from the Nigerian states of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara.

Although officials from Niger and Nigeria reportedly had set a December 2021 [deadline](#) for the repatriation of Nigerian refugees residing in Niger's Diffa region, at the end of the year 130,023 refugees remained in Diffa. However, in March UNHCR reported that a tripartite agreement on voluntary return was being finalized between it and the governments of Niger and Nigeria. Additionally, it published the findings of a return-intentions survey carried out in the third quarter of 2021. The [survey](#) was carried out in nine refugee-hosting locations in Diffa, and of the 6,668 refugees who participated, 68% reported they would consider returning to Nigeria, with 81% of these saying that they would return immediately.

As of March, UNHCR reported that there were [45,000](#) refugees from the far north of **Cameroon** in **Chad**. They had entered Chad following two waves of [conflict over scarce resources](#) between herders, farmers and fishermen in August and December 2021. Additionally, while some [25,000 refugees](#) who had fled into Chad already had returned to Cameroon as of early January, hundreds of these had been rendered homeless by the fighting.

Repatriations of refugees to **Côte d'Ivoire** from various host countries in the region continued in the first quarter of 2022, although at a slower pace than in the fourth quarter of 2021. As of 25 March some [8,535 Ivorian refugees](#) had returned to Côte d'Ivoire since the beginning of the year, a [reduction of about half](#) compared to the final three months of 2021. The [majority](#) came back from Liberia (7,531), followed by Guinea (567), Ghana (286) and Togo (144). Several also returned from Cameroon, Benin and Mauritania.

## Policy and legal updates

In January, the Nigerien police arrested approximately [twenty people](#) in Niamey and Maradi in connection to smuggling of migrants. They were implicated in document fraud and the organization of plane transport to Europe using these false documents. The arrests were the result of a ten day investigation by police from **Niger, France and Spain**, and follows a similar [joint investigation](#) that took place in October.

In February the **Director General of IOM** and the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees** conducted a [joint mission](#) to **Niger**. During the visit they went to Ouallam (Tillabéri region) and Agadez, met with the president and other government officials, and participated in a high-level roundtable on mixed migration in Niger. In addition to strengthening “operational links” between the two organizations, the High Commissioner and Director General used the opportunity of the visit to call for greater support to Niger on the part of the international community.

The **EU Commissioner for Home Affairs** also visited **Niger** in February, meeting with the president and other government officials and visiting Agadez. According to the [Commissioner](#):

*“We have a very good cooperation between the European Union and Niger and the purpose of my visit here was to learn more, to hear and exchange with interlocutors such as the Minister of Interior, in order to deepen and extend our cooperation in migration management, security and border surveillance.”*

In underscoring the commitment of the EU to further strengthen its [partnership](#) with Niger, she also emphasized the fight against the smuggling of migrants.

Prior to this trip, an [action file](#) was prepared outlining objectives and actions in relation to partnership with Niger as part of the [Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration \(MOCADÉM\)](#) of the **Council of Europe**. The objectives relate to supporting reception of displaced people and ensuring access to asylum, as well as combating migrant smuggling and strengthening [border management](#). The latter is to be addressed by enhancing **Frontex** support in Niger to facilitate border control in southern Libya and patrolling in northern Niger.

Before arriving in Niger, the **EU Commissioner for Home Affairs** also visited **Senegal** as part of a wider [EU delegation](#) in preparation for the European Union – African Union Summit. During the visit she proposed an operational deployment of **Frontex** to Senegal, allowing for the use of “[teams of standing corps and technical equipment](#)” who along with local authorities “[would work together to fight the smugglers.](#)” Such a deployment would be based in a “[status agreement](#)” negotiated between the Senegalese government and the EU Commission. This agreement would govern issues such as the use of weapons and possible immunity from prosecution, and could potentially allow Frontex to return intercepted refugees and migrants to Senegalese authorities and/or territory. Should the Senegalese government accept the EU’s offer, it would be the first time Frontex would operate [outside of Europe](#) with its own personnel. The [Commissioner](#) also offered to send specific surveillance assets such as vessels and drones. The proposal is seen as a response to the sharp increase in boat departures from the coast of West and Northwest Africa, and corresponding arrivals to the Canary Islands. Senegal’s Interior Minister has agreed to undertake “[technical discussions](#)” on the offer.

This Frontex proposal has met resistance from civil society. In their [Joint Declaration of African and European Civil Society Organizations](#) on the occasion of the Sixth European Union – African Union Summit, a collection of civil society groups and umbrella organizations stated that:

**“We strongly denounce the EU's willingness to negotiate with Senegal to strengthen the presence of FRONTEX off the coast of Senegal, which calls into question its national sovereignty, our freedom of mobility and also raises the problem of power relations between a state and a continental organization like the EU.”**

They do not feel that such a proposal is coherent with the African Agenda on Migration, and called on the EU to “abandon the security approach to migration policies.”

Following the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the **African Union** issued a [statement](#) regarding the ill treatment of African citizens seeking to leave the country. It stated that “reports that Africans are singled out for unacceptable dissimilar treatment would be shockingly racist and in breach of international law.” It called on all countries to respect the rights of all people to cross international borders during conflict, regardless of nationality or racial identity. African nationals comprised about [20% of Ukraine's student population](#); this includes significant numbers of West Africans, including around 1,200 Ghanaians and 4,000 Nigerians.

According to several key informants, a meeting was held with various government agencies and representatives of transport structures in mid-March to discuss ‘road harassment’ in **Niger**. Upon the instruction of the Nigerien Ministry of Interior, going forward passenger identity checks are supposed to be carried out inside of the bus rather than in police stations, and representatives of the transport sector are empowered to denounce any officials who extort passengers. However, as of mid-April, this new instruction did not appear to have been translated to practice.

At the end of March the UN’s [Committee of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families](#) reviewed the second periodic report of **Burkina Faso** on its efforts to implement the **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families**.

During the session, Committee members asked a variety of questions, particularly in relation to remittances and voting by diaspora members. The Burkina Faso delegation stated that remittances make up more than 3.4% of the country's gross domestic product, which primarily were used to provide support at the family level. They also said that more than 20,000 Burkinabè abroad had been enrolled to vote following information sessions for the diaspora held by the Electoral Commission. Other topics covered included trafficking in persons, collection of migration-related data, Burkina Faso's legal framework and labor agreements and protection of children in migration.

Two women from **Nigeria** have taken a [case](#) against **Italy** and **Libya** to the **UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**, claiming they were trafficked from Nigeria to Libya. The majority of the exploitation occurred in Libya, but lawyers for the women state that Italy is implicated as well because of its support to initiatives that ultimately returned the women to situations where they were at risk of abuse, both in Libya and back in Nigeria. The lawyers have expressed hope that the case could lead to better protection for victims of trafficking, increasing both safeguards in voluntary return processes and the possibility of asylum.



# Mixed migration from West Africa towards North Africa and Europe<sup>2</sup>

## Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Routes

In the first quarter of the year (as of 3 April), [UNHCR](#) estimated that there had been 8,944 arrivals to Spain by land (Ceuta and Melilla) and by sea (Spanish mainland, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands, Ceuta and Melilla), a 33% increase over the same period in 2021.

The majority of these were to the Canary Islands, which as of 31 March had documented [5,871](#) arrivals, a 71% increase over the first quarter of 2021. Arrivals continued a trend seen in 2021 of increased [feminization](#) of the route. Thus far in 2022 women make up about 15% of arrivals, similar to the 14% recorded in 2021, itself a jump from 5% in 2020. One in five deaths or disappearances recorded worldwide in 2021 by [IOM's Missing Migrants Project](#) occurred on the Atlantic Route to the Canary Islands.

### Reception on the Canary Islands

The situation of child refugees and migrants on the Canary Islands remains challenging, with reception capacity for minors severely strained. As of February some [2,800 minors](#) were in the care of the Islands' authorities, and the Director of Child Protection stated that any additional unaccompanied minor arrivals would need to be kept at the police station or in temporary centers, rather than in child-specific accommodation. The lengthy process for age determination is one factor putting pressure on these limited facilities. The Canary Islands government has requested the Spanish Ministry of Interior for additional child protection staff to carry out age determination at the point of arrival, but the Spanish government has said it will instead deploy military personnel to the beaches to do so. In March the Canary Islands parliament asked the Spanish government to carry out "[compulsory distribution](#)" of arriving minors among Spain's autonomous communities.

Another issue creating reception challenges both for [minors](#) and for other arrivals are disputes between various authorities – both at the local and national level – regarding reception. In one stark example, 400 newly arrived refugees and migrants on the island of [Lanzarote](#) were kept in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions, with only five chemical toilets and one water tap, despite the presence of a new and empty reception center nearby. The local authorities of Arrecife have raised administrative hurdles to the opening of the new center, which they say they were not consulted about.

Such grave humanitarian conditions harken back to an earlier point in the resurgence of arrivals to the Canary Islands, when lack of facilities presented a major challenge for reception. The case of the [Arguineguín](#) port on the island of Gran Canaria is the best-known example; in November 2020 some 2,500 people were sheltered there in squalid conditions. In January, a [court in Las Palmas](#) shelved a complaint that had been brought regarding the conditions of the camp located there. While agreeing that these were "deplorable," it did not consider that authorities intended to violate the rights of migrants, but rather that the situation arose due to "a lack of resources in view of the number of migrants who faced the crossing." The court

<sup>2</sup> Numbers in this section reflect best estimates available at time data was accessed (early April 2022) but source figures may be subject to later updates.

also stated that it was “not possible to foresee such a massive arrival,” although a [FRONTEX](#) report from February 2019 had warned about a potential increase in arrivals, and arrivals to the Islands had [climbed](#) steadily over the course of 2020.

## Diplomacy and deterrence

At the beginning of February the Director General of the [Spanish Guardia Civil](#) visited Mauritania, where 35 agents are deployed, taking the opportunity to appreciate “the excellent and solid collaboration between Mauritania and Spain.” During the course of her visit, she met with the Mauritanian Ministers of Defense and Interior to discuss, among other things, combatting irregular migration and controlling maritime migration flows. The Guardia Civil cooperates with Mauritania’s Coast Guard and National Gendarmerie, carrying out joint sea, land and air patrols with the latter. In 2021 the Guardia Civil conducted more than 300 sea patrols and more than 400 mixed land patrols in Mauritania, as well as providing aerial surveillance support.

On the part of the Mauritanian government, in January the [Prime Minister](#) stated that Mauritanian authorities had deported 7,000 “illegal immigrants” and dismantled 73 migrant smuggling networks in 2021. He also cited a decrease in the number of “irregular migrants on the Mauritanian coast” over the course of the year.

According to sources from within the Spanish police, in 2021 Mauritania [blocked](#) the largest proportion of departures for the Canary Islands of any of the regional countries with which Spain cooperates, stopping around half of attempts. This was an increase over the estimated 32.5% of attempts frustrated in 2020. Overall, Spanish sources estimate that in 2021 Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and the Gambia stopped about 40% of departures. These efforts are in line with a need expressed by [Spain and the EU](#) “to work closely with partner countries of origin and transit.” However, despite these interventions, [arrivals numbers](#) to the Canary Islands in 2021 (22,316) were almost on par with those in 2020 (23,023). Additionally, as [El Pais](#) notes, “the fate of intercepted migrants is uncertain and Spain neither intervenes nor guarantees that their rights are respected.”

## Attempts on Melilla

In early March, several attempts were made by large numbers of refugees and migrants to climb the fences and gain entry to the Spanish enclave of Melilla. Spanish authorities said that the attempt made on 2 March was the largest on record, with [2,500 people](#) from sub-Saharan Africa rushing the fence. Almost 500 made it inside the city; the rest were repelled by Spanish security forces. While some who had made the attempt were injured and hospitalized, others were bussed away from the Morocco/Melilla border by Spanish authorities. The next day around [1,200 people](#) sought to scale the fence, with about 350 people making it over. Several Spanish officers were also injured in the crossing attempts, and a government representative said that 84 more National Police and Guardia Civil officers would be brought in to augment border security. Less than a week later another attempt on the fence was made by around [1,000 people](#).

Earlier in the quarter, the [Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe](#) called on Spain “to rapidly provide law enforcement officials with clear and mandatory guidance on how to act in compliance with international human rights standards when intercepting migrants at the borders of Ceuta and Melilla.”

## Central Mediterranean Route

According to [UNHCR](#), the first quarter of the year saw 6,728 sea arrivals to Italy, a 20% decrease compared to the first quarter of 2021. Only two West African nationalities figured within the top ten nationalities of arrival, and with low proportions: 5% of arrivals hailed from Côte d'Ivoire, and 3% from Guinea. This is a confirmation [of the shifts in mixed migration on the Central Mediterranean Route](#), in numbers, but mostly in terms of nationalities and routes.

## Southbound mixed migration

### Returns within and to the West Africa region<sup>3</sup>

#### Internationally facilitated returns

During the quarter, IOM **Voluntary Humanitarian Return** operations took place from Libya to countries in the region. These included the return of more than [500 people](#) to Nigeria and [113 people](#) to Mali.

Multiple **Assisted Voluntary Return** operations by IOM also occurred from Niger to various regional countries. These included the return of [37 people](#) to Chad and [146 people](#) to Guinea. In spite of Mali's [border closure](#) in response to the imposition of sanctions by ECOWAS, there were also at least two flights returning Malians from Niger, with [149](#) people assisted to go back in early March and [150](#) assisted towards the end of the month.

#### Nationally facilitated returns from Senegal to Niger

In March the government of **Niger** repatriated more than 1,000 of its citizens (413 women, 162 men, 478 children) from **Senegal**. These returnees, who had been living in Dakar and supporting themselves by begging, hail from the Kantché and Magaria departments of Zinder region. The Nigerien government sees its citizens [begging abroad](#) as a phenomenon that “degrades the image of our country... and mortgages the future of innocent children...” The government has therefore announced its intention to stop this practice through repatriation of its citizens. It also appears to be placing a particular emphasis on law enforcement and countering the [human traffickers](#) it deems to be the cause of this “scourge.” According to the [Minister of the Interior](#), “It is not poverty that is at the origin of this phenomenon, as we are led to believe, but rather organized mafia networks that traffic these human beings.” The [Governor of Zinder](#) has called for relevant parties to “keep an eye” on the movement of women from the two affected departments, stating “If a transport company takes a woman with several children without valid reasons (...) its vehicle will be immobilized.”

## Expulsions from Algeria and Libya to Niger

According to the NGO *Alarme Phone Sahara*, some 8,207 people were expelled from **Algeria** to **Niger** in the first quarter of the year. These expulsions took place through an ongoing series of large scale ‘official’ convoys of Nigerien citizens and ‘unofficial’ convoys of non-Nigerien citizens, so-called because the

<sup>3</sup> This overview does not necessarily capture all return activity within the region.

unofficial convoys leave their passengers in the desert border area between the two countries rather than bringing them to any Nigerien municipality. The four official convoys accounted for some 4,792 people ([837 people on 24 January](#); [1,547 people on 9 February](#); [1,297 people on 10 March](#); and [1,111 people on 22 March](#)), of whom more than 750 were minors. The four unofficial convoys accounted for some 3,415 people ([754 people on 23 January](#); [1,269 people on 7 February](#); [810 people on 8 March](#); and [582 people on 20 March](#)) from a variety of predominantly West and Central African countries, of whom particularly significant numbers came from Mali and Guinea.

The NGO warned of difficult circumstances of reception for those who had been expelled, with overcrowded facilities and poor humanitarian conditions eliciting [protests](#) from non-Nigerien refugees and migrants. IOM and other organizations have reported being [overwhelmed](#) by the numbers of expelled people on one hand, and on the other hand facing delays in their repatriation to countries of origin due to challenges in collaboration with national authorities of these countries. Key informants have spoken specifically of Mali's border closure disrupting returns. [Deported Nigeriens](#) also face challenges, as they do not receive any government assistance to return to their places of origin within Niger as had previously been the case.

Alarme Phone Sahara also flagged the arrival in the Dirkou area of [190 people](#) who had been expelled from **Libya** into **Niger**. These included 110 people from Nigeria, of whom 80 were women, as well as 79 Nigeriens and one Ghanaian. Additional information from an MMC key informant suggested that at least 600 people expelled from Libya had been brought to Agadez by IOM in mid-March, with some of the most vulnerable of these then assisted onward to Niamey.

# Thematic Focus:

## Motivations and means of entry to engage in migrant smuggling

In 2021 the MMC conducted a quantitative survey targeting smugglers and facilitators<sup>4</sup> in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger,<sup>5</sup> and complemented this by conducting qualitative interviews with key informants and smugglers/facilitators<sup>6</sup> in these same countries. This data collection was carried out on behalf of the UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants, and the below analysis is drawn from work undertaken for a forthcoming publication of the UNODC West Africa Regional Office.

### Smuggler perspectives support nuanced understanding

The MMC has often argued for a [nuanced approach](#) to the consideration of migrant smuggling, and a recognition that “smuggling activities do not occur in a vacuum,” but rather are a product of their social, economic, political and legal contexts. This approach requires understanding what drives **demand** for smuggling services: very often a lack of accessible pathways for regular migration. However, it is also important to consider the **supply**, and to understand what spurs and enables smugglers to engage in these activities.

While the need to combat migrant smuggling is a common theme of government narratives and policy prescriptions, we seldom hear from smugglers and facilitators themselves. This research seeks to foreground their perspectives, shedding light on their motivations and means of entry to engage in migrant smuggling. It reminds us that they too are products of their environment and demonstrates the compelling economic considerations that exist in this context. However, it also highlights the agency they show, the social connections in which they are enmeshed, and the fact that financial gains aside, and notwithstanding [serious human rights violations](#) occurring in the context of smuggling, some smugglers and facilitators also wish to help refugees and migrants.<sup>7</sup>

4 MMC uses a broad interpretation of the terms ‘smuggler’ and ‘smuggling’, one which encompasses various activities — paid for or otherwise compensated by refugees and migrants — that facilitate irregular migration. These include irregularly crossing international borders and internal checkpoints, as well as providing documents, transportation, and accommodation. This approach reflects refugees’ and migrants’ perceptions of smuggling and the facilitation of irregular movement. Our interpretation is deliberately broader than the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants’ definition. However, this does not imply that MMC considers all activities it includes in its broad understanding of smuggling to be criminal offences. MMC prefers to use the term ‘human smuggling’ instead of ‘migrant smuggling’ as smuggling involves both refugees and migrants. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) [Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants](#) uses the word ‘smuggler’ when it can reasonably be assumed that the crime of migrant smuggling is constituted, as per Article 3 of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, while the word ‘facilitator’ is used whenever the elements of (a) irregular entry and/or (b) financial or material benefit, could reasonably be assumed not to be in evidence. [www.unodc.org/res/som/index.html](http://www.unodc.org/res/som/index.html).

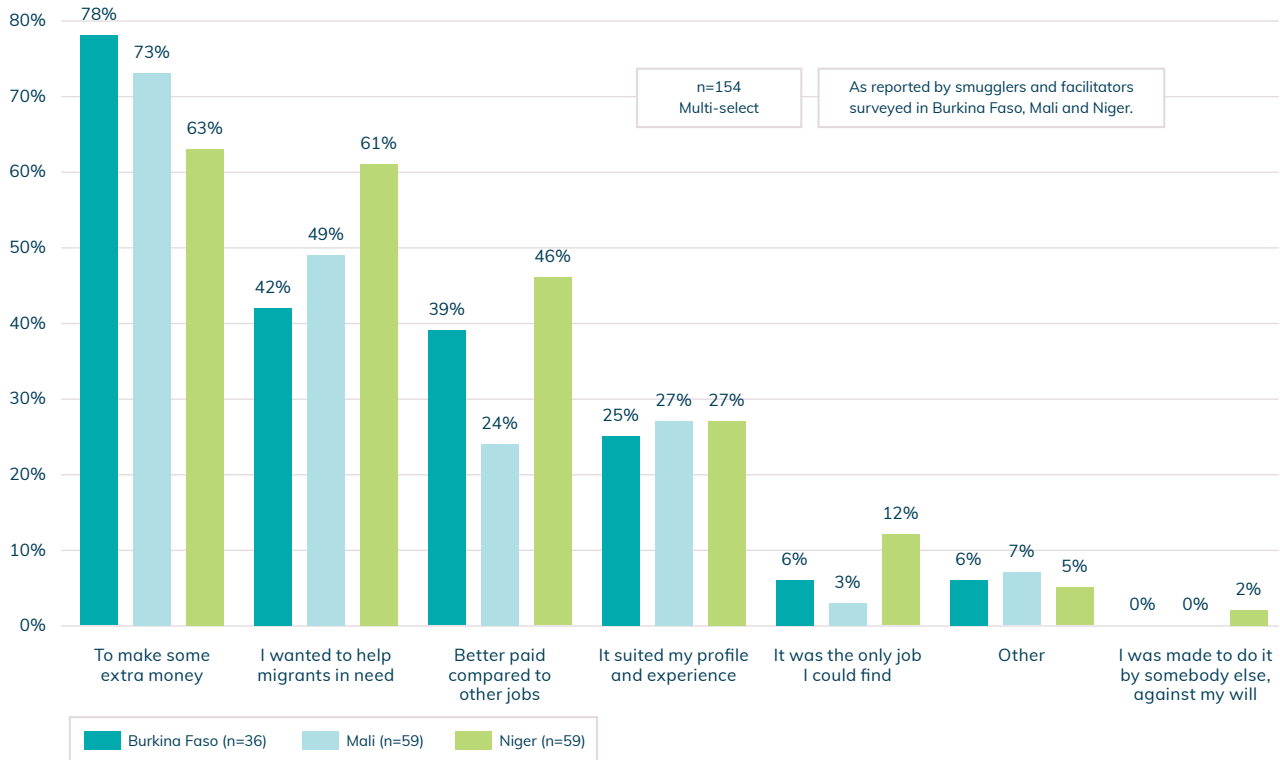
5 The MMC carried out 154 quantitative surveys with 12 women and 142 men; 36 respondents were surveyed in Burkina Faso, and 59 respondents were surveyed in both Mali and Niger.

6 6 key informants and 6 smuggler/facilitators were interviewed in each of the three countries. All interviewees were male with the exception of one key informant and one smuggler/facilitator interviewed in Mali.

7 In fact, the second most frequently cited reason for why they started working in smuggling given by 4Mi smuggler/facilitator respondents (52%) was a desire to “help migrants in need.” Additionally, 15% of respondents said they got their start working in migrant smuggling because “migrants asked for help.”

## Economic considerations as motivating factor

**Figure 1. What were the primary reasons you started working in smuggling?**



**Making extra money was the most frequently indicated reason for getting involved in smuggling** across all countries of interview.<sup>8</sup> More than half of respondents (60%) said they had completed secondary education, vocational training or university – a higher educational attainment than the average for their countries of interview.<sup>9</sup> The majority (77%) also said they held other jobs concurrently with their smuggling activities. However, the region is known for challenging economic conditions – e.g. high rates of in-work poverty and informal employment. In describing the West African labor market, the [African Development Bank](#) has stated:

*“Almost all of its actors are informal and the majority of jobs available are self-employment, with a fairly high level of underemployment. Informal workers are often poorly paid and generally receive wages below the poverty line.”*

These factors may push people – even those with education and employment – to seek out additional livelihood opportunities. Qualitative respondents also helped draw a **connection between stagnant**

<sup>8</sup> Many respondents reported working in more than one country, thus country of interview is not necessarily their sole or primary country of operation; nonetheless this disaggregation suggests that differences do exist depending on where smugglers/facilitators are located.

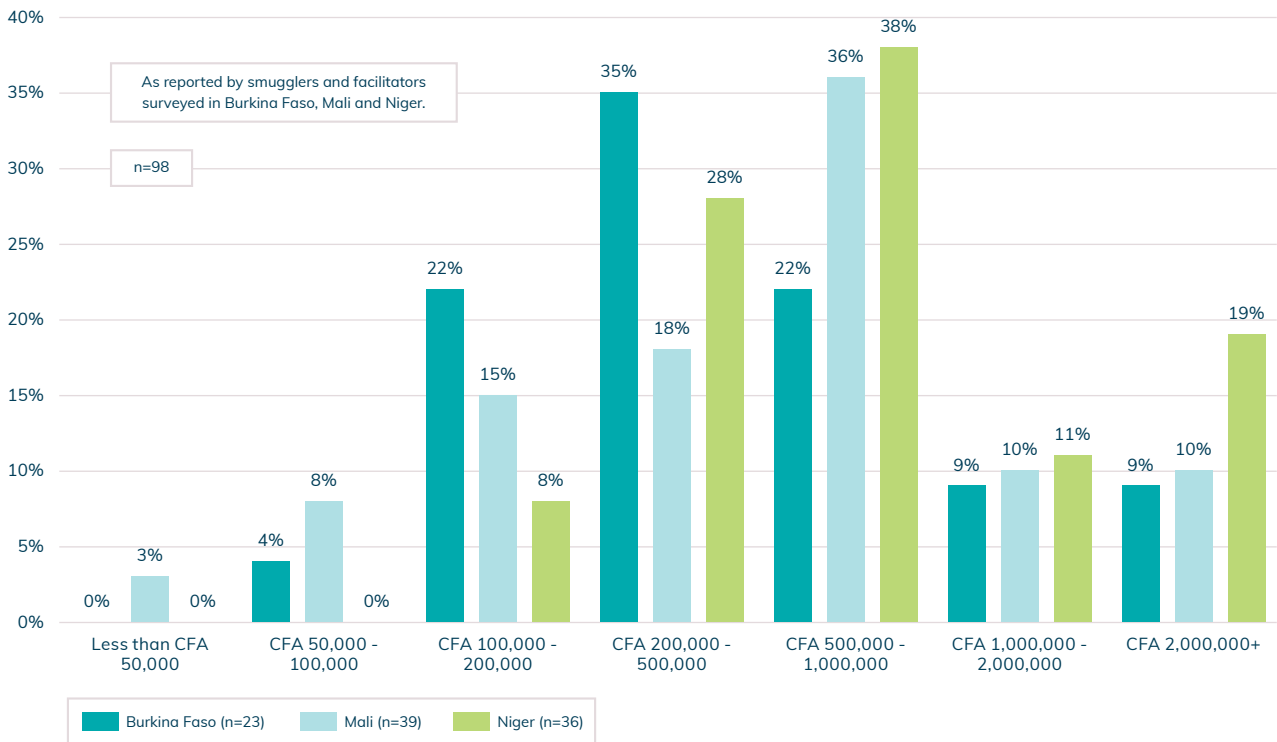
<sup>9</sup> According to [UNICEF](#), in Burkina Faso, 9% (6% female, 13% male) had completed lower secondary school and 4% (2% female, 6% male) had completed upper secondary school (2010 statistic). In Mali, 30% (25% female, 36% male) had completed lower secondary school and 17% (12% female, 23% male) had completed upper secondary school (2015 statistic). In Niger, 6% (4% female, 10% male) had completed lower secondary school and 2% (1% female and 4% male) had completed upper secondary school (2012 statistic).

**economic opportunities and a drive to engage in migrant smuggling.** According to a key informant interviewed in Burkina Faso:

“...the smugglers too, it’s the lack of activities, the lack of jobs, the lack of opportunities that now mean that any opportunity, any opportunity even if it is bad, it is a bargain to be made, and also once it starts to be profitable, you agree with me that it becomes very difficult to be able to really stop these [smuggling] activities.”

**Smuggling profits typically surpass other available income opportunities**, often substantially, creating a very clear financial pull. The profits that respondents said they had made in the previous month occupied a wide range, but they averaged around \$1500 (CFA 850,284) a month, which is more than the [annual per capita GDPs](#) of each of the countries of interview. To draw a more targeted comparison, the average driver in Mali makes about \$70 (CFA 40,000) a month.<sup>10</sup> This is a particularly important point of comparison given that driving/transportation is significant both as a job held before entry into migrant smuggling<sup>11</sup> and at the same time as migrant smuggling,<sup>12</sup> thus illustrating the temptation a driver may feel to undertake smuggling activities.

**Figure 2. How much money did you make last month?**



10 Of the 98 respondents who specified their previous monthly earnings, 96 reported making CFA 100,000 or more. This is at least 2.5 times what the average Malian driver makes.

11 In response to the question “Before smuggling, what was your main profession?” the top three responses were “small business” (36%), “driver/transportation” (35%) and “other” (8%).

12 In response to the question “What is your other occupation?” the top three responses were “small business” (42%), driver/transportation (40%) and “agriculture/pastoralism/fishing” (7%).

The economic benefits of smuggling are at times very visible, with personal connections at the local level serving as both an example of success and an introduction to the business. A smuggler/facilitator interviewed in Mali alluded to this dynamic of emulation:

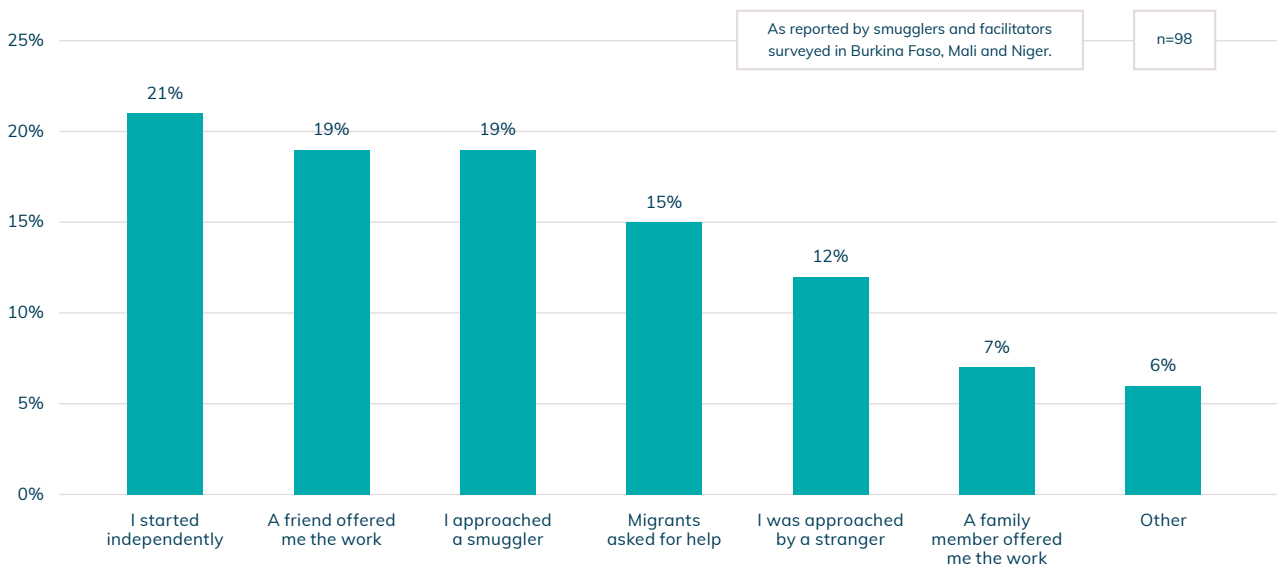
“I saw my big brothers who were doing this activity, and who became rich easily before me. So, I said to myself, listen, why not me too, I want to be rich like them.”

Another explained how a close personal connection gave him his start:

“Well, I was unemployed, and I finished my studies, and I didn't have a job, so it was my brother [family member/friend] who was the owner and manager of the inn, and he built another one...That's how I got into this activity.”

### Getting started in migrant smuggling

**Figure 3. How did you start working in migrant smuggling?**



In keeping with the above discussion of the importance of social connections and influences, 4Mi data showed that 26% of respondents indicated that a friend or family member (cumulatively) offered them work in smuggling, compared to only 12% who were approached by a stranger.

Looking further at how respondents got their start in migrant smuggling we see that 40% stated that they had either started working in migrant smuggling independently or that they had approached a smuggler. This proactive drive to seek out smuggling opportunity is likely underpinned, at least to some extent, by the perception shared by multiple key informants and smuggler/facilitator interviewees



**that migrant smuggling is “easy money.”** The compelling profitability discussed above coupled with strong market demand and relative ease of entry appeared to drive this perception.

**Particular backgrounds and professional experiences also lend themselves to migrant smuggling work.** In qualitative interviews, key informants and smugglers/facilitator interviewees explained how **the transport and tourism industries are frequent entry points for migrant smuggling activities**, mainly because people working in these sectors develop the knowledge needed to facilitate migration and have opportunities and/or resources (such as a car) to do so with minimal effort. One key informant interviewed in Mali explained:

*“Many [smugglers/facilitators] were tourist guides. But there is no more tourism in Mali...So you become a boatman. The system is like that. They have to live. They have to feed their children, their families.”*

Additionally, **migration itself can be a means of entry into migrant smuggling activities.** Former refugees and migrants may have gained useful knowledge and connections through their own migration experience, and their ability to liaise easily with people from their country of origin could also be beneficial. At times the impetus for people to begin this work may be influenced by their reluctance to return home following an unsuccessful migration attempt. A key informant from Mali described the path from migrant to smuggler as follows:

*“You know, first, to become a smuggler, the migrant must have accumulated several failures. He must be in a situation of no return. He has nothing more to gain or lose, so what else can he do? What else can he do? That's all he knows!”*

They may prefer to avoid the potential shame and censure of returning to their place of origin with “empty hands” and instead capitalize on the knowledge they have gained en route.

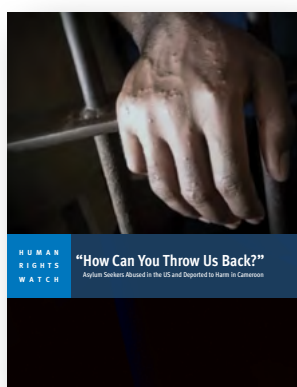
## Highlighted New Research and Reports



### [National Study on the Nexus Between Migration, Environment and Climate Change in Niger | Étude nationale sur le lien entre Migration, Environnement et Changement Climatique au Niger](#)

#### **International Organization for Migration | February 2022**

This study seeks to provide empirical data that allows governmental and non-governmental actors to better handle challenges related to the Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) nexus in Niger, allowing for the identification of vulnerabilities and the building of resilience. It is based on quantitative surveys of 355 rural households across six regions and 147 internal migrants in Niamey, as well as qualitative inputs from 14 focus group discussions and 24 semi-structured interviews with a variety of actors including national and local elected officials, traditional authorities, women's groups etc. After laying out contextual, theoretical and methodological components, the study outlines findings from the surveys of rural households and internal migrants in Niamey, examines gender dynamics related to the MECC nexus, highlights regional variations in the MECC nexus, and discusses local action being taken to mitigate the consequences of climate change. It also provides recommendations to the Nigerien authorities, IOM, international organizations and development agencies and civil society organizations and local populations.



### [“How Can You Throw Us Back?” Asylum Seekers Abused in the US and Deported to Harm in Cameroon](#)

#### **Human Rights Watch | February 2022**

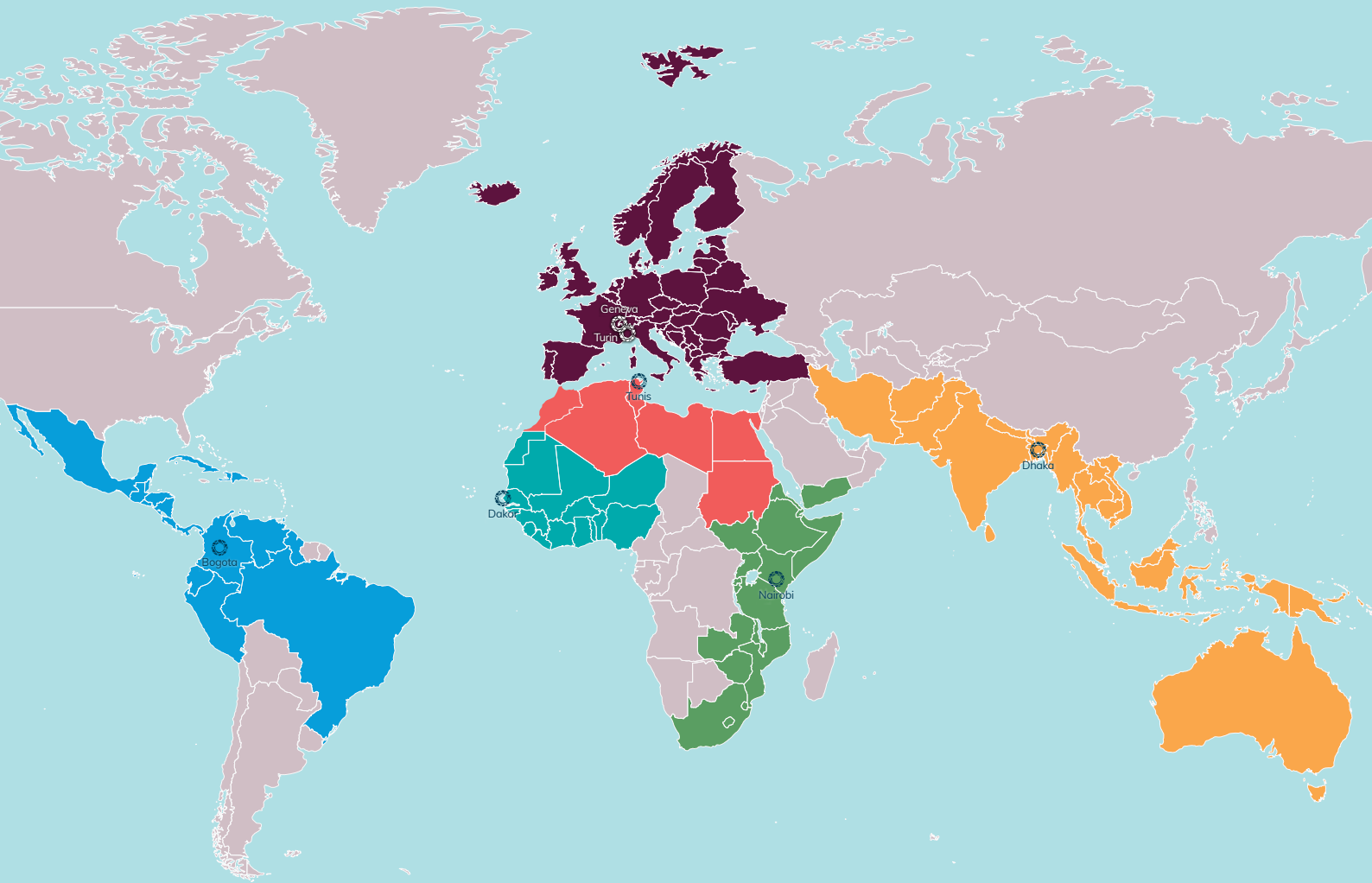
From December 2020 to January 2022, Human Rights Watch interviewed almost 100 people (41 deported Cameroonian asylum seekers, 4 asylum seekers in the US, 54 key informants including personal connections of the deportees, lawyers, activists and witnesses to abuses) to shed light on the fates of asylum seekers deported from the US back to Cameroon between 2019 and 2021. The report documents human rights violations faced by dozens of these asylum seekers following their deportation to Cameroon. It also details abuses suffered by deportees while in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the US. It finds that many of these deported persons had credible asylum claims, and calls for the US government to allow Cameroonians deported during 2020 and 2021 to return to the US for “urgent humanitarian reasons.”



## [African migration: beyond borders](#) | [Migrations africaines : au-delà des frontières](#) | [Migraciones africanas: más allá de las fronteras](#)

### **Institut de Recherche pour le Développement | January 2022**

This special feature draws on research from IRD and its partners, providing an overview of migration in and from Africa across a variety of themes, and with a particular emphasis on West Africa. It starts by examining historical dimensions of and foundations for migration in West Africa. Next it charts the ever-more restrictive policies aimed at African migration, also highlighting unintended consequences. The feature reflects on “migrants as adventurers,” considering motivations for migration relating to discovery of self and the world, as well as risk-taking behavior rooted in social imperatives to engage in migration. It also outlines benefits and drawbacks of migration in terms of health, with migration facilitating access to treatment for some while negatively impacting health outcomes for others. Finally, it looks at migration as a vehicle for social transformation, with impacts for religion, cities and education.



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 Geneva, Turin, Dakar, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Dhaka.

**For more information visit:**

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

