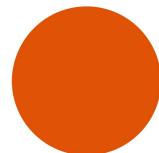


# Niger

## .Migrations PROFILE

*Study on Migration Routes  
in West and Central Africa*



*October 2017*

**Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG)**



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# 1. Introduction

Niger is a country located in West Africa and, with a surface area of 1.27 million sq kilometres, it is the 22<sup>nd</sup> biggest country in the world and the second biggest in Central and West Africa. It shares its northern border with Mali, Algeria, and Libya, its eastern border with Chad, and its southern border with Nigeria, Benin, and Burkina Faso. Niger has an estimated population of almost 21.5 million (UN DESA, 2017). The country's population lives in the south at the border with Nigeria and Benin, since the Sahara Desert covers most of the rest of the country (CIA, 2017). With a per capita income of \$978.4 per year and a poverty rate of 48.9 per cent, it is one of the poorest countries in the world (World Bank, 2017a).

Moreover, the country has a Human Development Index of 0.353 (giving it a rank of 187 out of 188 countries worldwide), making Niger one of the least developed countries in the region and in the world. In 2016, total unemployment was estimated at 2.6 per cent and youth unemployment at 4.6 per cent (World Bank, 2017a).



Source: CIA, 2017.

**Table 1: Niger Key Demographic and Development Indicators**

| Indicator  | Niger   |
|--|---|
| Total area, <i>in sq km</i> <sup>a</sup>   | 1,267,000   |
| Population (2015), <i>in million</i> <sup>b</sup> UN DATA                                    | 19.268  |
| Urban Population (2015), % of total <sup>b</sup> UN DATA                                     | 18.7  |
| Population Growth Rate, <i>annual %</i> <sup>c</sup>   | 3.8   |
| Ethnic Groups <sup>a</sup>   | Hausa 53%<br>Zarma/Songhai 21%<br>Tuareg 11%<br>Other 15% |
| Human Development Index (2015),<br><i>country rank out of 188</i> <sup>d</sup>               | 0.353<br>187  |
| GDP Based on PPP per Capita, <i>current international dollars per capita</i> <sup>c</sup>    | 978.4   |
| Life Expectancy at Birth (2015), <i>years</i> <sup>d</sup>                                   | 62.2  |
| Unemployment (2015), % of labour force <sup>c</sup>  | 2.6   |
| Youth Unemployment (2015), % ages 15-24 <sup>c</sup>   | 4.6   |
| Multidimensional Poverty Headcount (2014), % <sup>d</sup>                                    | 58.4  |
| Gini Coefficient (2010-2015) <sup>d</sup>  | 34.0  |
| Foreign Direct Investment (net inflows, 2015), <i>current USD millions</i> <sup>c</sup>      | 524.979   |
| Net Official Development Assistance Received, <i>constant 2014 USD millions</i> <sup>c</sup> | 977.350   |

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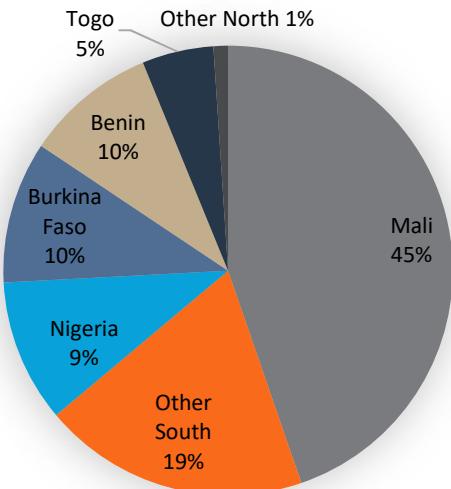
<sup>a</sup> CIA, 2017; <sup>b</sup> UN DESA, 2015; <sup>c</sup> World Bank, 2017a; <sup>d</sup> UNDP, 2016.

In 2015, Niger had an estimated migrant stock of 190,000 people (UN DESA, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. However, 124,721 of them were refugees (UNHCR, 2017d). In 2013, Niger had a negative (yet close to zero) net migration rate (-28/1000 people), indicating that it was both an immigration and an emigration country with the latter being the more prominent (UN DESA, 2013). As shown in Figure 2 and as supported by UNHCR (2016a), Nigerien people mostly migrate to neighbouring countries, and less than 3.5 per cent of the emigrant population migrates to other continents. Similarly, as illustrated in Figure 1, most immigration in Niger originates in neighbouring West African countries, with Mali, Burkina Faso, and Benin being the most recurrent. Recently, forced immigration from West African countries to Niger has been exacerbated by various security concerns, including violent extremism by Boko Haram in the north of Nigeria, civil war in Libya, and violent conflicts in Mali (World Bank, 2017b). These situations have led to steep increases in the number of refugees hosted by Niger since 2014. As May 2017, the country hosted almost 310,000 displaced people, including 60,000 Malians, 120,000 Nigerians, and around 130 Nigerien IDPs (UNHCR, 2017a). The refugee population among the displaced people is almost 163,000 (UNHCR, 2017b). Importantly, most of these individuals are confined in the Diffa region, which is now suffering from severe levels of food insecurity (World Bank, 2017b).

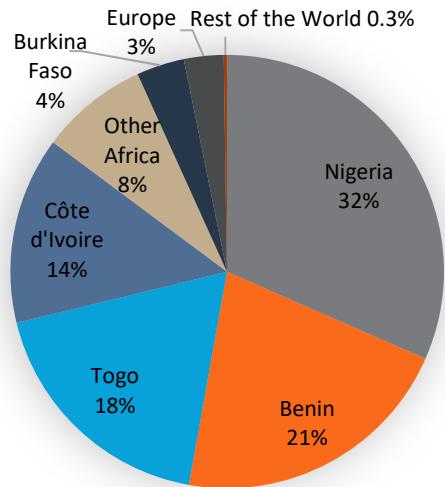
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<sup>1</sup> Note that migration statistics from UN DESA (2015) illustrate mixed migration stocks and may include some, but not all, of refugees in/from a given country. For further information visit:  
<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml>

**Figure 1: Origin of Migrants in Niger, 2015**



**Figure 2: Destination of Migrants from Niger, 2015**



Source: UN DESA, 2015.

Source: UN DESA, 2015.

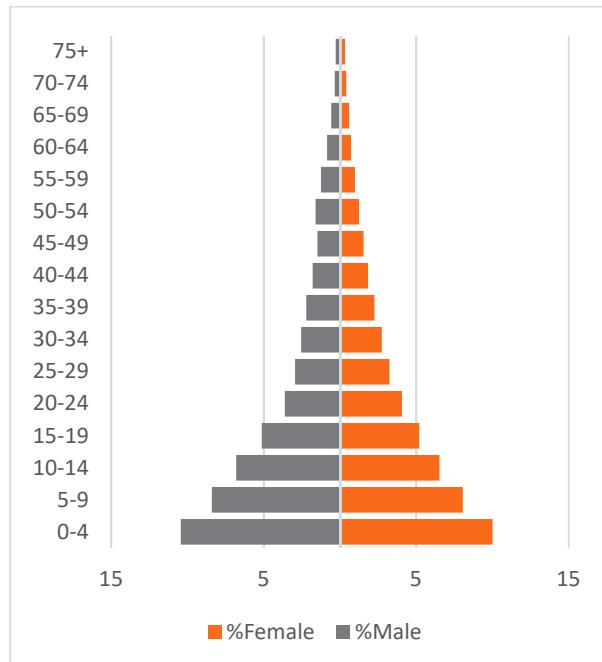
Regarding mixed migration flows, Niger is, at present, the most important transit country for West African migrants (Tinti, & Westcott, 2016). UNHCR (2017c) estimates indicate that, in 2016, as many as 300,000 migrants transited in Niger. Similarly, it has been estimated that more than half of West African refugees that arrived in the Italian island of Lampedusa in 2014 transited through Agadez, a city in the northern part of Niger (Wittenberg, 2017). Since mid-2016, the IOM Flow Monitoring Report has registered a decrease in the number of migrants transiting through Niger. However, it is unclear if this decrease is due to a stronger effort to fight human smuggling and human trafficking by the government of Niger or if, as a consequence of these efforts, such activities have just moved underground and become harder to detect (UNHCR, 2017c).

Interestingly, in 2016, the Mediterranean Migration Research Programme (MEDMIG) surveyed migrants arriving in Italy by sea and estimated that 99 per cent of the people that transited through Niger chose to continue migrating towards Libya; this perhaps indicates the presence of strong smuggling/trafficking networks between the two countries (MEDMIG, 2016). Indeed, irregular migration facilitated by smuggling or forced by trafficking is now one of the most lucrative businesses; it is also an important feature of Niger's economy, especially in the regions of the Sahara and the Sahel (Tinti & Westcott, 2016). Accordingly, amongst the possible African routes used by migrants and refugees to come to Europe, the one going through Niger is the most used (Wittenberg, 2017). Several factors account for why this route is so popular, but two are considered the most important. Firstly, by passing through Niger, migrants can avoid the conflicts in northern Mali. Secondly, by using this route, migrants can circumvent border controls and the administrative challenges related to transiting in Algeria. Niger is part of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) community, and migrants from West Africa can enter the country without a visa for as long as 90 days. This implies that the risks related to irregular migration are reduced, since a smuggler service would only be needed to go from Niger to Libya (Tinti & Westcott, 2016).

Comparing the population pyramids of the total population of Niger and of the total migrant stock (Figures 3 and 4, respectively), interesting differences appear. It stands out that the migrant stock population pyramid (Figure 4) has a rather usual shape with a concentration of people in young and

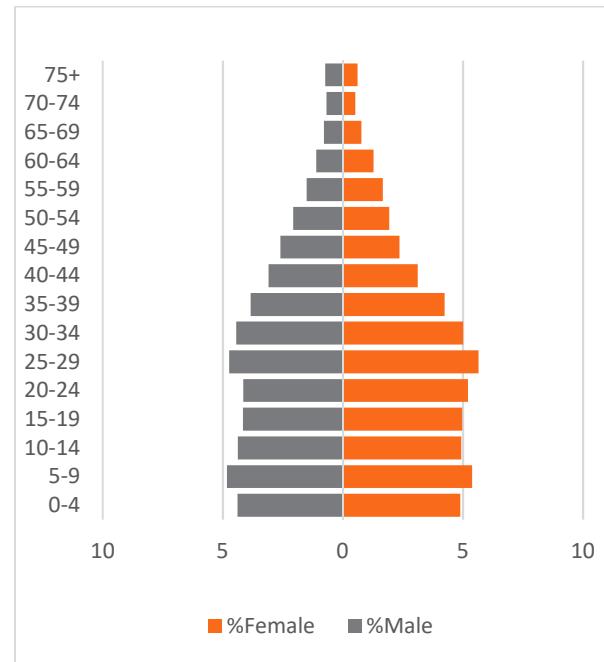
working age groups. In contrast, the Nigerien population pyramid (Figure 3) is highly concentrated among young age groups. Demographically, this clustering of the Nigerien population is not surprising as Niger is the country with the highest total fertility rate in the world (6.62), one of the countries with the lowest life expectancy (55.5 years), and the country with the youngest population (mean age: 15.3 years) (CIA, 2017).

**Figure 3: Total Population in Niger by Age Group, 2015**



Source: UN DESA, 2015.

**Figure 4: Migrant Stock in Niger by Age Group, 2015**



Source: UN DESA, 2015.

## 2. Forced Migration/ Displacement

### 2.1. Refugees in Niger

In Niger, the refugee population stock is 162,473, while the asylum seekers hosted in the country are 98. The main countries of origin of the refugee population are Nigeria and Mali, accounting for 106,146 and 55,892 refugees respectively and altogether representing 99.7 per cent of the total refugee population in Niger (UNHCR, 2017d). These refugees received their status on a *prima facie* basis due to the problems they were facing in their origin countries (UNHCR, 2017c). Both Nigerians and Malians migrated to Niger in search of peace and security after the outbreak of violent conflicts that started in 2009.

The causes for displacement amongst the Malian population are, in fact, related to the situation of civil war experienced in the country since 2009, with the main actors involved in the conflict being the government, the affiliated militias, and the rebel coalition lead by the ethnic group Tuareg (Dobbs, & Gaynor, 2015). Despite some fluctuations in 2013, the number of Malian refugees in Niger overall increased since the beginning of the civil war, and it has never been as high as the one registered in January 2017 (UNHCR, 2017d). Moreover, the number of Malian refugees is expected to increase even further in the future for mainly two reasons. Firstly, the 2015 peace deal between the Malian government and the rebel groups is very fragile, and the two coalitions have clashed

numerous times since then. Therefore, a re-escalation of the conflict is a very possible scenario. Secondly, in the northern and central regions of Mali, the number of attacks conducted by Islamist armed groups are increasing, and they more than doubled in 2016 as compared to 2015. Hence, as a result of these two situations, Mali is expected to experience high food and personal insecurity, and the number of displaced population both internally and externally is extremely likely to increase (ACAPS, 2016).

Nigerian refugees migrate towards Niger mainly because of the violent extremist group Boko Haram, operating since 2009 in the northern part of Nigeria. Arguably, many refugees also migrated due to the severe levels of food insecurity that Nigeria is recently experiencing (ACAPS, 2016). Interestingly, the number of Nigerian refugees in Niger increased between 2009 and 2015, levelled off during 2015, and has dropped since May 2016. This sizable reduction was mainly due to a steady return of Nigerian refugees to Yobe state, which occurred as a result of increased security in that part of Nigeria (ACAPS, 2016). However, in the first months of 2017, there has been an upward trend in the number of Nigerian refugees in Niger, a trend which is expected to continue (UNHCR, 2017d). In the future, conflicts due to Boko Haram in both Nigeria and Niger are expected to exacerbate, and IDPs and returnees are likely to suffer from secondary displacement. In fact, since 2015, IDPs and refugee camps in Niger have been directly targeted by the terrorist group, and this trend is expected to continue (UNHCR, 2016b). Moreover, it is very probable that famine and food insecurity in Nigeria will persist, with catastrophic consequences for the Nigerian population. Hence, given these two situations that will lead to food insecurity and personal insecurity, it is very likely that the number of Nigerian refugees in Niger will further increase in the coming years (ACAPS, 2016).

Rather than being restricted by an encampment policy, 65% of refugees in Niger live in spontaneous sites along the main road of the Diffa region, in the southeast of the country close to the border with Nigeria. This is a semi-desert environment, where shelters are made of straw, sanitation is lacking, and children do not have access to education (UNHCR, 2016b). Moreover, food scarcity and insecurity challenge people living in these sites; so does the violence caused by the increasing attacks of Boko Haram in the region (UNHCR, 2016b). Furthermore, around 20 per cent of refugees are hosted in refugee camps in the southwest near Niamey, the capital of Niger. Niamey itself hosts 2.5 per cent of the refugee population. Lastly, 11.4 per cent of the refugees are hosted in the Intikane hosting area (UNHCR, 2017d). This latter group is free to settle in a vast area with their livestock, and they are not forced to settle in a specific place like those living in camps. This new solution was implemented since 2013 to adapt the concept of refugee camps to the lifestyle of Malian nomadic groups. Interestingly, the main protection issues found in the Intikane area are the same of those found in the three biggest refugee camps; these challenges include under-representation of women in community structures, lack of birth certificates for new-borns, low enrolment rate of girls in school, forced and early marriages, incidence of sexual violence, ethnic tension, and conflict over resources with hosting communities (UNHCR, 2013a; UNHCR, 2013b; UNHCR, 2015a; UNHCR, 2015b).

**Table 2: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Niger, May 2017**

| <b>Country of Origin</b> | <b>Refugees</b> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Nigeria                  | 106,146         |
| Mali                     | 55,892          |
| Chad                     | 165             |
| Others                   | 270             |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>162,473</b>  |

Source: UNHCR, 2017d.

## 2.2. Refugees from Niger

In contrast to the stock of refugees in Niger, the number of refugees from Niger is relatively small. Moreover, information about refugees from Niger is also lacking. According to UNHCR (2017f), in 2016, there were 1,379 Nigerien refugees worldwide. However, as shall be explained in the following section, there are 127,000 IDPs in Niger, indicating that most forced migration in Niger happens within the borders of the state (REACH, 2017a). Nevertheless, this should be considered just as a temporary situation, and those that are internally displaced at present could become refugees in the future; this may especially be the case if Boko Haram attacks on IDP locations continue into the future.

## 2.3. Internal Displacement in Niger

Forced displacement in Niger, and especially in the Diffa region, started in 2013. It has become a major issue since 2015, when Boko Haram started to attack civilians in the Niger territory, triggering large scale displacement. Specifically, these attacks were carried out in the cities of Diffa and Bosso, from which most IDPs come (IDMC, 2017). Indeed, according to REACH (2017a), 93 per cent of IDPs have fled their homes due to insecurity in their villages. Most IDPs have been displaced for more than one year, yet few reported the desire to return to their contexts of origin. This is because consistent levels of insecurity in their villages of origin preclude them from going back (REACH, 2017a).

As of May 2017, Niger was home to 127,391 IDPs, mostly living in spontaneous sites along the eastern part of the *Route Nationale 1*, which connects Niamey with the city of Diffa. A minority of IDPs have settled in towns and villages also located in the Diffa region (REACH, 2017a). Moreover, UNHCR has established two IDP camps in this region, which host around 16,000 IDPs. In total, 140 IDP locations have been identified in Niger (IDMC, 2017). Importantly, it is estimated that approximately 121,000 people out of the total IDP population are living in the Diffa region (REACH, 2017b).

IDPs face major risks, and their situation continues to deteriorate due to repeated attacks by Boko Haram on IDP locations (UN OCHA, 2016). Indeed, IDPs are significantly vulnerable to violence, and they are victims of security incidents regularly. The most prominent examples include robberies, physical violence, and clashes between armed groups. Moreover, the IDP situation has worsened by widespread insecurity due to a lack of access to basic services, such water or sanitation. Women and girls avoid using latrines for security concerns, and children do not go to school because of the high risks of abduction. Lastly, prostitution and forced labour are common instances among the IDP

population, including among IDP children (REACH, 2017a). Given these areas of concern, the main efforts to protect IDP communities are centred around eliminating sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), securing child protection, improving access to education, and preventing conflicts (REACH, 2017b).

## 3. Regular/ Labour Migration

### 3.1. Immigration

This section is constrained by the fact that it relies mostly on rather outdated sources; existing data on regular and labour migration to Niger are scarce. Moreover, it seems that immigration for labour purposes is not relevant in the context of Niger (IOM, 2009). This is not surprising, though. Particularly since it is the poorest and least developed country in the region, Niger is not an attractive destination for migrants (UNDP, 2016). Furthermore, it is challenging to consider Niger an immigration country, as most foreigners are nationals of ECOWAS states and benefit from free circulation. Hence, given the short-term nature of their movements, they cannot be considered permanent migrants (CARIM, 2011).

International migrants represent less than 1 per cent of Niger's total resident population and have an ambiguous impact on the country's economy. According to UN DESA (2015), the main countries of origin of economic migrants are Mali (47%), Benin (10%), and Burkina Faso (10%). The typical profile of a labour migrant to Niger is considered to be consistent in terms of age groups (mainly aged between 15-64 years) and sex, which is generally balanced between males and females (UN DESA, 2015; CARIM, 2011). Importantly, since 2003, as a consequence of the raising of uranium prices, many foreign companies from all over the world have been attracted to Niger. Specifically, French, Chinese, Canadian, and Australian companies have opened in Niger. In 2007, foreign firms represented 5 per cent of the total companies operating in Niger, indicating a large overrepresentation of highly-skilled immigrants in the country (CARIM, 2011).

### 3.2. Emigration

Data on Nigerien emigration are very scarce as there is no entity or service entrusted with collecting data on Nigeriens abroad. Similarly, in Niger's population census, there is no question regarding emigration (IOM, 2009). In 2015, the stock of Nigerien emigrants was estimated to be 356,793 people, representing 1.8 per cent of the country's total population (UN DESA, 2015). The main destination countries of Nigerien emigrants were Nigeria (32%), Benin (21%), and Togo (18%), while less than 3.5% of Nigerien emigrants migrated outside of the African continent (UN DESA, 2015). There are no disaggregated data regarding regular and irregular emigration from Niger. However, Nigerien emigration in West African countries is considered to last an average of 6-7 months, a longer period compared to the 90 days prescribed by the ECOWAS agreement (IOM, 2015). Thus, it reasonable to assume that most emigration happens regularly but it may become irregular after the overstaying of the permit.

Since 1990, emigration has been led by economic factors, largely related to the difficulties of the Nigerien agricultural sector (CARIM, 2011; IOM, 2015). Indeed, remittances play an important role in

diversifying the income of Nigerien households. In 2015, they amounted to \$108 million, representing 1.5% of Niger GDP (World Bank, 2017c). Estimates from the Niger Central Bank indicate that the largest portion of remittances (83%) is sent from African countries (IOM, 2015). However, it should also be noted that informal channels for remittances appear to be prominent, and that this data might underestimate the phenomenon. Generally, Nigerien migrants are low-skilled, and the risk of brain drain has stayed limited in Niger. Indeed, Nigerien emigrants in neighbouring countries are mainly employed in the agricultural sector. In Europe, they usually work within the industrial, trade, and hospital sectors. Importantly, Nigerien emigration is considered a gendered phenomenon, in which males are highly overrepresented and female migration is constrained. This could be partially explained by gender inequality that limit the possibilities of female migration (IOM, 2015). Indeed, Niger is ranked 187/188 countries on the gender inequality index, implying that gender roles and norms actively constrain women rights including freedom of movement (UNDP, 2016).

## 4. Internal Migration

There is a substantial lack of data on internal migration in Niger. However, by looking at the share of the urban population as percentage of the total, it stands out that there is an increasing yet slow urbanization process, characterized by rural-urban movements. Specifically, the urban population as share of the total increased steadily from 6 per cent in 1960 to almost 20 per cent in 2016, indicating a rising number of people resettling in cities (World Bank, 2017a). Similarly, during the dry season following the harvest, men from rural Niger are most likely to migrate both internally as well as internationally to support their communities (Bailey, 2008). Indeed, for these communities relying on crops and livestock, income is considered to drop immensely during the dry season. This situation creates seasonal rural-urban movements each year between January and April; this season migration is vital in providing farmers with most of their yearly cash income. As a drawback, communities with seasonal migrants have particularly high incidences of HIV/AIDS. In the Tahoua community, for instance, rates of HIV/AIDS are twice the national average (Bailey, 2008).

## 5. Irregular Migration

Niger is probably the most important hub for irregular migration in West Africa (Tinti, & Westcott, 2016). Particularly, it is the main transit country used by West and Central African migrants that migrate towards Libya, Algeria, and to a lesser extent Europe (UNHCR, 2017g; IOM, 2017). In 2016, mixed migration flows in Niger were estimated around 300,000 people (UNHCR, 2017c), while as May 2017, this number was already over 60,000 (UNHCR, 2017g). Furthermore, it is estimated that more than half of the West Africans migrants that in 2014 arrived by sea in the Italian island of Lampedusa transited through Niger (Wittenberg, 2017). The country's geopolitical situation makes Niger a sensitive area for irregular migration, as it is located right between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, with Libya being the most important transit country for people trying to reach Europe (UNHCR, 2017g).

Due to its nature, collecting data on irregular migration flows is generally rather challenging, and systematic assessments of mobility throughout West and North Africa are very complex. Moreover, migrants and smugglers adjust their routes constantly. This means that the presented data, even if

considered to be the most accurate, do not reflect the overall entries or exits from Niger (IOM, 2017a). To collect these data, IOM has created two monitoring centres in border cities along the two main Nigerien routes. Specifically, one monitoring centre was set in the city of Alrit to monitor migration to and from Algeria, and one in Seguedine to monitor migration flows between Niger and Libya. Generally, it has been identified that young men represent the overwhelming majority (90%) of migrants transiting in these hubs (IOM, 2017a). Moreover, it stands out that most of them originally come from Senegal, Nigeria, Gambia, Mali, and West Africa (IOM, 2017). According to IOM (2017), in 2017, more than 90 per cent of these migrants migrated due to the willingness to improve their living conditions as well as to seek better jobs and opportunities.

In May 2017, almost 8,000 migrants transited to Libya from Seguedine. The majority of them were from Niger (24%), followed by Nigeria (21%), Gambia (14%), Senegal (16%), and Ivory Coast (6%). Instead, in May 2017, the number of people travelling from Libya to Niger through Seguedine was 31,000. The main nationalities among inflows migration from Libya are of people originally from Niger (87%), Nigeria (6%), Gambia (1%), and Ghana (1%) (IOM, 2017a). At the same time, in May 2017, around 4,100 migrants transited through Alrit to Algeria. Most of them were from Niger (28%), followed by people from Mali (14%), Guinea (10%), Cameroon (10%), and Nigeria (9%). Similarly, the number of migrants transiting from Algeria into Niger was estimated to be around 4,200 in May 2017. Most them were from Niger itself (25%), followed by migrants originally from Mali (21%), Guinea (10%), Cameroon (9%), and Nigeria (8%) (IOM, 2017a).

As described previously, there are two main routes for irregular migration in Niger. The most used goes straight to Libya, while the other one leads to Algeria and eventually to Libya. Indeed, people transiting through Niger mainly do so by using smuggling services, but instances of trafficking are recurrent as well. Among these routes three cities are considered of great interest: Agadez, Alrit, and Seguedine (IOM, 2017). Agadez is located in the northern part of the country in the middle of the Sahara. It is where migrants arrive before continuing along one of the two main routes. IOM estimates indicate that as many as 170,000 migrants transited through Agadez in 2016 on their way north (Micallef, 2017). In fact, this city is considered the most important hub of human smuggling and trafficking in Niger. In Agadez, there is a human smuggling industry which is articulated though all levels of society and which is vital part of the economy of the city and of the country (Diallo, 2017). Nonetheless, human smuggling in Agadez was recently curbed due to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, a plan that led to a tight cooperation between the EU and Niger on matters related to irregular migration (Diallo, 2017). Specifically, since September 2016, stronger and more repressive measures against smugglers transporting migrants (from Agadez to Libya or Algeria through Arlit and Seguedine) have been taken. Smugglers have been arrested and the cars used to smuggle migrants confiscated. These efforts remarkably decreased the number of migrants travelling along those routes (IOM, 2017). However, many experts argue that smuggling in Niger did not stop at all, and data on arrivals in Italy show that the business continues. Rather, it is suggested that the practice is now more underground and harder to track (Micallef, 2017). Indeed, there are reports of smugglers using different routes which are riskier and also two to three times more expensive (Diallo, 2017; IOM, 2017; Micallef, 2017; Tinti & Westcott, 2016).

## 5.1. Human Smuggling

Human smuggling and human trafficking are crimes against international law and involve the irregular movement of people from one country to another. The main two differences between these phenomena lie in the presence or absence of consent and in the exploitation of the migrant upon destination. Indeed, smuggling (as opposed to trafficking) is a service that migrants consensually use to get from A to B and which finishes upon arrival. In contrast, trafficking victims are forced to migrate against their will (absence of consent) and exploitation of the trafficked person continues upon arrival at the destination (UNDOC, 2017). Nevertheless, the lines between trafficking and smuggling are thin, and smuggling very often becomes trafficking due to the increased vulnerability of migrants on the move (UNDOC, 2017).

As mentioned in the previous section, human smuggling is rampant in Niger, especially in the Sahara and Sahel regions. Moreover, it is vital to the political economy of the country (Diallo, 2017; Tinti & Westcott, 2016). Smuggling networks are affiliated on ethnic lines, with the groups Tebou and Tuareg managing most human smuggling in Niger (Frontex, 2016). These transnational ethnic groups can indeed encompass Nigerien borders and create networks across countries. In fact, despite nationality, the Tuareg and Tebou can be found both in Libya and Algeria (Frontex, 2016; Micallef, 2017; Tinti & Westcott, 2016). Moreover, facilitating the movement of people across the Sahara has been part of their traditional livelihoods for centuries (Tinti & Westcott, 2016; Frontex, 2016).

The most important hub for smugglers is the city of Agadez, from where smuggling directly toward Libya or first toward Algeria and then Libya starts. These are indeed the two most important smuggling routes in Niger, with the first being referred to as Central Mediterranean Route and the latter as Western Mediterranean Route. On average, migrants pay between 200 and 300 dollars for smuggling services, depending which Libyan city they want to reach. Transportation occurs mostly via Toyota Hilux cars or large trucks. While the trip on the Western Mediterranean Route takes an average of ten days, the one on the Central Mediterranean Route is has a generally shorter average duration of between three and six days (Frontex, 2016; Tinti & Westcott, 2016).

The smuggling network that manages migration on the Western Route is primarily composed by Tuareg. However, this route is not as popular as the Central Mediterranean Route directly connecting Niger to Libya. In fact, the conflicts that started in 2016 between Tuareg and Tebou near the city of Ghat made the Western Mediterranean Route very dangerous. Moreover, Algeria is not an ECOWAS member which means that, if migrants are detected transiting in Algeria, they are at risk of deportation or detention. Bribing police and soldiers to avoid these instances is possible, but it makes the trip more complicated and expensive (Tinti & Westcott, 2016). Instead, the Central Route going from Agadez to Seguedine and then Libya is more widely used; the vast majority of people using it hold an ECOWAS passport, which enables them to freely move in Niger (Micallef, 2017; Tinti & Westcott, 2016). The Central Mediterranean Route is governed by the Tebou ethnic group that, with their militias and parts of the national army, have high influence in northern Niger and southern Libya (Micallef, 2017). Their network has grown rapidly and now has recruiters and brokers throughout West and East Africa. However, the extent to which these are criminal networks rather than freelance smugglers is controversial. Tebou are consistently reported to work independently and to not be part of a broader organization (Tinti & Westcott, 2016).

Migrants smuggled through Niger are considered highly vulnerable. Indeed, the Central Route is the most used and most deadly route used by migrants trying to reach Europe. Estimates indicate that, in 2016, one out of every twenty-three people using this route died (IOM, 2016). Indeed, travelling through the desert generally implies exposure to heat, cold, dust, food, and water scarcity. Moreover, people are exposed to abuses, beatings, and tortures by security forces at check points and border police at the Libyan border (UNICEF, 2017). Even if there are no data available on the people who perished during the smuggling in the Sahara, estimates indicate that more than 130,000 migrants died in the desert in the last six years (EPSC, 2017).

As subset of the smuggled population, women and children should be considered particularly vulnerable when compared to men, as they are at greater risk of sexual abuse and abduction for trafficking purposes (UNICEF, 2017). Estimates indicate that nearly half of the women and children along the Central Mediterranean Route experienced sexual abuse multiple times and in multiple places. Furthermore, sexual abuses appear systematic and widespread at security check points and at the border with Libya, where women have to provide sexual services for crossing the border. At the same time, men often have to pay bribes. However, men are sometimes also victims of sexual violence; and if they try to prevent it, they are often killed (UNICEF, 2017). This situation of widespread abuses and rapes is concerning as it highly damages migrants on the move, causing mental and physical trauma, communicable disease infections (such as HIV/AIDS), and unwanted pregnancies.

## **5.2. Trafficking in Human Beings**

Niger is considered an origin, transit, and destination country for trafficking in human beings for the main purposes of forced labour, sex trafficking, and forced prostitution (US Department of State, 2017). Despite efforts in eliminating human trafficking, the country is ranked Tier 2 Watch List by the US Department of State's (2017) Trafficking in Persons Report. Nigerien women and children face high risks related to trafficking. Children experience a various range of abuses including forced begging by religious instructors, forced work in gold and stone mines, and forced labour in the agricultural sector (US Department of State, 2017). Moreover, some are forced in domestic servitude and prostitution. Similarly, girls are vulnerable to becoming victims of forced prostitution, especially at the border with Nigeria in the Zinder region. Furthermore, caste-based slavery affects around forty thousand people, and girls born into slavery are often victim of forced and early marriages. Trafficking occurs inside the borders of the state but also toward Mali, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Europe. This trafficking of human beings is run by freelance individuals or by loosely organized networks. Sometimes women that have been previously victims of trafficking run this business as well and comply with the exploitation of children (US Department of State, 2017).

Niger is also an important transit country for West African people moving toward North Africa or Europe, and these people are at great risk of being trafficked. Specifically, women and children from Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Mali are considered the most in danger (US Department of State, 2017). Indeed, the link between smuggling and trafficking in Niger is clear and, for many smuggled migrants, smuggling in Niger becomes trafficking. This is a rather common instance as trafficking patterns commonly follow smuggling ones (UNICEF, 2017). In this context of human trafficking in Niger, Nigerian women and children are considered the most in danger (US Department

of State, 2017; IOM, 2017b). According to IOM (2017b), around 80 per cent of Nigerian women that arrive in Italy by sea are victims of human trafficking, and most of them transit in Niger. Moreover, their numbers (as well as the number of young girls as a share of the total) have been steadily increasing since 2011. The main destination countries for their exploitation are Italy, Spain, France, and Germany, but they are often forced into prostitution already during transit both in Niger and in Libya (IOM, 2017b; US Department of State, 2017)

## 6. Migrant's Vulnerabilities and Protection Issues

In Niger, there are many protection and vulnerability issues, not only concerning migrants, IDPs, or smuggled/trafficked persons but also concerning the Nigerien population. As mentioned previously, Niger is almost the least developed country in the world, almost 50 per cent of its population lives under the poverty line, and nearly one person out of every five people cannot meet their food needs (WFP, 2017). Young girls and boys from lower casts of society are considered highly vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of forced labour and forced prostitution (US Department of State, 2017). Moreover, rural communities with seasonal migrants are considered highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infections (Bailey, 2008).

As a particularly vulnerable group of people living in Niger, refugees and IDPs are considered to have similar risks and vulnerabilities. Most of them are living in straw shelters in spontaneous sites in the desert area of Diffa, with lacking sanitation and few education opportunities (UNHCR, 2016b). Moreover, food scarcity and insecurity worsen their situation, which keeps further deteriorating due to repeated attacks by Boko Haram on IDP and refugee locations (UN OCHA, 2016; UNHCR, 2016b). This situation makes refugees and IDPs extremely vulnerable to physical violence, robberies, and clashes over resources. As subset of the refugee and IDP population, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to abduction and sexual abuses, with forced prostitution and forced labour being common instances in these sites (REACH, 2017a). Given these areas of concern, the main efforts to protect IDP and refugee communities are centred around SGBV, child protection, access to education, and conflict prevention (REACH, 2017b).

Another population of concern is that of migrants smuggled towards Libya. During the trip in the desert, they are exposed to heat, cold, food, and water scarcity. Additionally, in the Sahara Desert, these migrants are systematically abused, beaten, and tortured by security forces at check points and border police (UNICEF, 2017). Women and children are extremely vulnerable in this regard, as they face great risks related to sexual abuse and abduction for trafficking. It is estimated that half of the women and children smuggled along this route are sexually abused multiple times and in multiple places. These instances cause unwanted pregnancies, mental and physical trauma, and communicable disease infections for these women and girls (UNICEF, 2017).

## 7. Relevant National Policies and Stakeholders

Niger's efforts of making a national migration policy started in 2007, with the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee tasked with linking migration and development. This unit was established under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, but it comprises officials from other ministries, IOM

and EU representatives, as well as representatives from civil society organizations. However, even though this committee was able to draft a first policy document in 2014, a national migration policy has not been adopted yet. Indeed, as shall be explained below, despite the efforts of the Nigerien government to link migration and development, its initiatives are rarely implemented. In practice, immigration in Niger is mostly treated in a “laissez-faire” manner (IOM, 2015).

While many ministries are concerned with migration issues, the four most prominent stakeholders involved in migration management are the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Employment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Finance. Specifically, the Ministry of Interior is responsible for the entry, stay, and repatriation of foreigners. The Ministry of Employment delivers work authorisations to foreign workers, implements strategies to enhance remittances, and plays an intermediary role between international employers and Nigerien jobseekers. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for maintaining relationships with Nigerien emigrants, and the Ministry of Finance oversees policies on remittances. The latter task is accomplished with the help of another inter-ministerial committee created in 2013 to enhance diaspora engagement. This committee includes people from the main ministries, IOM and UNDP staff members, and representatives from civil society and the private sector (IOM, 2015).

Overall, Nigerien policy framework on immigration is considered well-balanced but lacking regarding family migration and types of stay permits (which are too short in duration). Moreover, even if there is a national legislation to regulate labour immigration, it is rarely enforced and there are serious implementation problems. Importantly, as a principle, foreigners in Niger benefit from all the rights and obligations of the labour legislation, regardless of their status. Indeed, the Nigerien approach toward irregular migration is rather relaxed. Foreigners are removed from the country based on the criminal offences that they may commit, rather than due to their irregular status (IOM, 2015). Nevertheless, following the Trust Fund for Africa, the Nigerien government started to pay more attention to irregular migration and especially to the issues of human smuggling and human trafficking (Diallo, 2017). The number of border officials and police to curb these criminal activities in Niger has increased. Furthermore, national authorities have made significant improvements to combat trafficking in persons by creating awareness campaigns, by persecuting and convicting offenders, and by providing training to staff working in key positions (IOM, 2015). The most prominent agreement that was ratified by Niger for the protection of trafficking is the Palermo Protocol, which aims to suppress and punish trafficking, especially when related to women and children (CARIM, 2011).

Emigration is also increasingly receiving attention by Niger, yet there is no labour emigration policy nor have activities started to enhance legal labour emigration opportunities. Moreover, even though a Ministry of African Integration and Nigers Abroad was created in 2007, a lack of financial resources coupled with limited data on Nigerien emigrants largely constrains the ministry's functioning ability (IOM, 2010). The only efforts have been put into bilateral agreements which, however, cannot be considered labour agreements per se. Furthermore, the capacity of the Ministry of Employment in developing those policies is quite limited. This situation is worsened by the fact that Nigeriens are denied rights of dual nationality; because of this, diasporas often lose their Nigerien nationality. Furthermore, even if they do have the nationality, they are excluded from national politics as they do not have the right to vote. These are considered major impediments to diaspora engagement policies (IOM, 2015; IOM, 2010).

**Table 3: Niger's Key Migration Policy Response**

| Policy  | Content  |
|---|--|
| <b>ECOWAS, 1979</b>   | Allows for free circulation of ECOWAS citizens in Niger without a visa requirement and free circulation of Nigeriens in ECOWAS countries. The stay in a ECOWAS country without a visa is prescribed to a maximum of 90 days.   |
| <b>Ordinance No. 81-40 on Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Niger, 1981 &amp; Decree No. 87-076 on Entry and Stay Conditions of Foreigners in Niger, 1987</b> | <p>These acts define the Nigerien immigration legislation framework. Specifically, they prescribe the possible entries and stays of foreigners in Niger and include some specific regulations for foreign workers.</p> <p>Regarding entry in Niger, they prescribe that it should only happen through the delivery of a visa or stay permit; these are usually delivered in advance but can also be delivered upon arrival. Furthermore, entry in Niger is subject to a guarantee of return, meaning that foreigners need to hold a ticket to return to the country of origin to obtain a visa. However, as guarantee of return, a deposit or a bank guarantee are also accepted.</p> <p>Entry visas do not exceed three months, and if foreigners want to reside longer in Niger, they must apply for a stay permit at the Ministry of Interior. Indeed, irregular stay in Niger is considered a criminal offence. To obtain a stay permit, a medical certificate and a proof of regular entry are required. Additionally, students need to present a guarantee of sufficient financial means, while workers must provide a work authorisation. Once the permit is delivered, it has a validity of 2 years, after which it can be renewed under the same circumstances of its first delivery. Importantly, if the holder of the permit leaves Niger for more than six consecutive months, the permit might be revoked.</p> <p>Foreign workers can enter in Niger only with a work authorization that must be delivered before their entry in the country. ECOWAS citizens are excluded from this process and have preferential treatment regarding labour opportunities in Niger, for which the principle of reciprocity applies. Workers without a work authorization must be deported and can be sanctioned with fines of 4,000 to 50,000 CFA francs (7.5 to 95 USD). Moreover, they can be imprisoned up to fifteen days. Similarly, smugglers that facilitate irregular migration are subject to fines and up to two years of imprisonment. Lastly, any foreigner that constitutes a threat to public order must be deported.</p> |
| <b>Labour Code, 2012</b>  | The labour code is the main regulating framework for foreign workers. By principle, it declares equal treatment of national and foreign workers. However, foreigners that have resided in Niger for at least three years can work in administrative and executive functions. Moreover, the labour code specifies that the admission of foreign workers should be based upon the absence of "national competences" in that field and that the work permit should be delivered within 30 days. Lastly, it prescribes that an employer employing a foreign worker is obliged to organize training for national staff to replace foreign workers.  |
| <b>Ordinance No. 2010-86 on Combatting Trafficking in Persons</b>   | This is the main regulating framework to fight human trafficking, and it states that protection and assistance to human trafficking victims will equally apply to national and foreigners. It foresees between 5 and 10 years imprisonment for trafficking offences. Moreover, in aggravating circumstances, it foresees between 10 to 30 years imprisonment, while in case of death of the victim it prescribes life imprisonment. This ordinance also foresees the establishment of a National Commission to fight against trafficking in persons with the responsibility of collecting and sharing information, training public services staff members, and preventing  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | trafficking activities.   |
|  | This ordinance prescribes that the state should give protection and assistance to the victims of human trafficking with medical, psychological, and legal support. This assistance will be given also to victims in an irregular situation who will obtain a temporary stay permit, which under some circumstances might become permanent. Instead, in case of repatriation, the security of the victim must be taken in consideration.   |
| <b>Convention with Burkina Faso, 1964</b><br><b>Convention with Mali, 1964</b>                                     | "Nationals from the considered countries can enter and reside on the territory of the other state party without the need for a visa or a stay/resident permit. The only requirement is the possession of an identity document from the country of nationality. Not only are these provisions more favourable than those foreseen by the ECOWAS texts but they are also easier to implement as they do not impose on the states obligations to be carried out but rather a duty to abstain." (IOM, 2015. p. 253)   |
| <b>Convention with Tunisia, 1966</b>   | "Its content is similar to the agreements with Burkina Faso and Mali and foresees the entry, stay and residence without the requirement of a visa or a permit. It also specifically mentions the principle of access to the labour market on an equal footing with nationals." (IOM, 2015. p. 253)  |
| <b>Convention with Morocco, 1967</b>   | "This foresees the removal of visa requirements for nationals of the state parties." (IOM, 2015. p. 253)  |
| <b>Convention with Algeria, 1981</b>   | "Foresees the removal of visa requirement for nationals of the state parties. While the agreement with Morocco has been in force since the 1990s, visas are still required for nationals of Algeria to enter Niger and vice-versa. The agreement includes a provision on readmission of migrants in an irregular situation (art. 5) which remains applicable today." (IOM, 2015. p. 253)  |
| <b>Conventions with Libya, 1971</b>  | "The convention of 1988 does not include specific rights regarding entry and stay, but rather guarantees the general civil and economic rights of the considered individuals. The 1971 convention foresees a specific legal regime for Nigerien seasonal workers in Libya. It sets up cooperation mechanisms between the competent authorities of the two states for the recruitment of workers, foresees the delivery of a three-month visa, and a stay permit valid for one year, which is renewable up to a limit of two years." (IOM, 2015. p. 253) |
| <b>Conventions with France: Social security, 1973</b><br><b>Agreement on circulation and stay of persons, 1994</b> | "The 1994 convention includes the following derogation to the common French immigration legislation: Nigerien nationals have the possibility to obtain a 10 year residence permit after three years of stay in the country (instead of five years under French administrative law)." (IOM, 2015. p. 253)  |
| <b>Agreement with Italy, 2010</b>  | This agreement foresees cooperation activities between Niger and Italy in the area of trafficking in persons and irregular migration, focussing particularly on security issues.  |

Sources: CARIM, 2011; IOM, 2015

In addition to these policies, Niger has signed the following international conventions protecting human rights (IOM, 2015):

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966);
- International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966);
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979);
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989);

- 36 ILO Conventions, though Niger has not ratified the two specific ILO conventions on migrant workers: C97 (1949) and C143 (1975);
- Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990);
- United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000), and its protocols on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.

## Gaps

According to IOM (2009), a first gap in Nigerien migration management regards statistics and data collection. Particularly, there is little data on immigration (especially regular and labour migration) into Niger, emigration out of Niger, and internal migration within Niger. There is not enough information on the country's migration issues, and the data that exist are collected in an old-fashioned manner and typed by hand. This situation highly constrains the capabilities of building adequate policies, especially regarding Nigerien emigrants (IOM, 2010). Hence, there is a pressing need to modernize the ways in which these data are collected and to increment the amount of this data as well. Accordingly, IOM (2009) suggests including more questions on migration issues in the population census.

Other problems arise from the policy implementation side. Indeed, despite the overall well-designed national policies and the many international conventions ratified, Niger struggles in effectively enforcing these acts. This situation results in a weak migration governance, in which the rights of foreign workers and Nigeriens abroad are not adequately protected. Similarly, the rights of IDPs and refugees are not satisfactorily defended, and these populations are extremely vulnerable (CARIM, 2011; IOM, 2015). Thus, implementation is probably the main constraint of Nigerien migration governance. Moreover, it is unclear whether or not the Nigerien state is able to adequately distinguish between smuggling and trafficking.

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