



# MIGRANTS REFUGEES

## Migration Profile of

## NIGER

### A. Executive Summary

Niger is positioned at the crossroads of the migratory routes of West and Central Africa. Thus, Niger has become one of the main transit countries for migrants originating from West and Central Africa, moving to North Africa, and migrating irregularly across the Mediterranean. Despite being in a region of political instability and violent extremism, Niger has demonstrated relative stability, both politically and socially. Owing to the closure of the border between Chad and Libya, and the growing dangers on the route through Mali to Algeria, the migration route through Niger has become increasingly relevant. Traditionally, Nigeriens have migrated in an attempt to cope with the dire economic circumstances of their country. Migration has generally been seasonal, during the long dry season. Circular migration has also been common in the region, with Nigeriens migrating to Libya and Algeria, then returning home after a number of years. Recently, however, migration has become more frequent, more irregular, and is characterised by increasing danger and uncertainty. This spike in irregular and unconventional migration can be seen as having been influenced by two key developments: the fall of the Gaddafi regime and the passing of the Anti-Smuggling Law by the Nigerien government.

For decades, Niger has experienced regular patterns of migration. The steady flow of migrants from West and Central Africa rapidly accelerated after the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011. In 2015-2016, migration reached its peak as an estimated 330,000 migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers travelled through Niger, with 170,000 moving through the city of Agadez. Agadez and other communities along the main migratory routes were positively affected by this boom in migration. Local economies began to flourish, and migration became a primary source of income for many of these communities. Concerned by the increasing numbers of African migrants to Europe, the European Union attempted to incentivize Niger with aid and assistance, in return for curbing irregular migration. This led to the implementation of the anti-smuggling laws, which in turn led to migration flows dropping from 333,891 in 2016 to 43,380 in 2018.

As is the case across West and Central Africa, migration in Niger is driven by a range of negative factors, in particular: economic circumstances, dire environmental realities, violence, and persecution. Emigration in Niger is important for sustaining the livelihoods of rural communities and often takes the form of seasonal labour migration towards neighbouring countries. Nigeriens most commonly migrate internally or to other nearby countries in the region (Nigeria, Libya, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Algeria). In recent years, the government's inability to provide alternative solutions for Nigeriens who are unable to find

work and who are struggling to sustain themselves has created conditions that have motivated individuals to leave the country.

Forced migration and internal displacement have only begun constituting an important part of Niger's migration profile in recent years. These realities have become increasingly relevant due to the deteriorating political situation in neighbouring countries. Niger hosted 380,135 persons of concern as of April 2019, and a total of 156,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of December 2018, caused by an increase in outbreaks of violence in Nigerien border regions.

Migration issues in Niger are largely managed with a *laissez-faire* approach. Indeed, migration is not considered to be a key issue for Niger. On a national level, a nationwide policy on migration has yet to be adopted. However, the State did establish a special inter-ministerial committee on migration policy development in 2007, and has since created the first draft of a policy document. Due to the instability in the region, as well as the growing danger and irregularity of migration, a holistic response to migration management on the part of the government is key to ensure Niger's stability. On a regional level, Niger is bound by ECOWAS legal instruments, including its treaty (1975) and its subsequent protocols regarding the free movement of persons, residence, and establishment.

## **B. Country Profile**

### **I. Basic Information**

The Republic of Niger is a landlocked country in West Africa named after the Niger River. Niger is bordered by Libya to the northeast, Chad to the east, Nigeria to the south, Benin to the southwest, Mali to the northwest, Burkina Faso to the southwest, and Algeria to the northwest. Niger is the largest country in West Africa, with over 80% of its land area lying in the Sahara Desert. The economy centres on subsistence crops, livestock, and some of the world's largest uranium deposits. Niger has a population of 22,000,000. The Nigerien population, predominantly Muslim, lives mostly in clusters in the far south and west of the country. A mere 16.5% of the total population lives in urban areas. The population can be divided into the following ethnic groups: 53.1% Hausa, 21.2% Zarma/Songhai, 11% Tuareg, 6.5% Fulani, 5.9% Kanuri, 0.8% Gurma, 0.4% Arab, 0.4% Tubu, and 0.9% other/unavailable. The current issues in the country include food insecurity, lack of industry, high population growth, a weak educational sector, and few prospects for work outside of subsistence farming and herding. Moreover, transnational and social issues include: a dormant dispute in the Tommo region with Libya, over an area of 25,000 km<sup>2</sup>; the location of the Benin-Niger-Nigeria tripoint being unresolved; the fact that only Nigeria and Cameroon have heeded the Lake Chad Commission's admonition to ratify the delimitation treaty that also includes the Chad-Niger and Niger-Nigeria boundaries; a dispute with Burkina Faso that was referred to the ICJ in 2010; and the 265,522 internally displaced peoples in the regions of Diffa, Tillabéri, and Tahou as a result of clashes between government forces and the Tuareg militant group.

### **II. International and Internal Migrants**

Between 2016 and 2019, Niger had registered 1,055,214 migrants with 55% emigrants, 29% immigrants, and 16% internal migrants. A significant decline in migration flows was witnessed after the Government of Niger implemented Law 2015-36 in 2015, which criminalized irregular migration. Internal migration within Niger takes on many different forms: pastoralists have historically moved over hundreds of kilometres with their livestock in the dry and rainy seasons; merchants will move from market to market in local and regional areas on a seasonal basis; Koranic students will often move to work for or study with a particular marabout; and labour migrants will move across the country or to other countries in the region for work opportunities (e.g. gold mines, oil drilling sites, crop-raising areas). Migration profiles across Niger differ from region to region. During higher rainfall periods, movements occur to the North. Long-distance seasonal movements are very costly and are usually only be considered by families with easy access to cash. Seasonal migrants will generally attempt to resettle in an urban centre such as Niamey, before deciding to migrate to more distant destinations within Niger or Nigeria. Migration in Niger does not often involve entire families – traditionally, only certain members of the family migrate, leaving the remainder of the family at a home base. Due to the fact that many migrants only earn a subsistence wage, the economic benefit of the labour migration process in such cases is having one less person at home to feed.

Following the political crises in Mali and Libya in 2011, Niger has become a popular transit destination. Migration flows in West Africa have traditionally been intraregional. With the adoption of the Free Movement Protocol between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), migration across the region has intensified. Several key events have affected the migration routes and flows in Niger between 2010 and 2019. Firstly, the instability in Libya has led to less border controls and migrants being able to cross into Niger more easily. Secondly, the discovery of gold in Djado, north-eastern Niger, led to a rush of migration of prospective gold miners in 2014. Thirdly, the adoption of the 2015 Law criminalizing irregular migration in Niger has led to an increase in the number of checks by law enforcement actors along migration routes, leading to many migrants finding themselves stuck in transit towns.

While Niger cannot be considered a major country of destination for international migrants, it is a very important country of transit for sub-Saharan migrants, mainly from ECOWAS member states. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there were 294,200 international migrants in Niger as of 2019. International migrants comprise 1.3% of the total population in Niger. The vast majority of international migrants in Niger come from West and Central Africa. According to IOM data, almost half of the registered migrants come from just two countries: Guinea (24%) and Senegal (21%). Other top nationalities of migrants include: Cameroon (9%), Côte d'Ivoire (8%), Guinea-Bissau and Gambia (7%), and Mali (6%). The majority of the international migrants in Niger are male (64%) and between the ages of 18-29 (72%). Only 5% of international migrants are minors (younger than 18 years old) and only 4% are 40 years of age or older. The majority of international migrants are single (58.5%), with only about a third declaring that they are married.

Niger is a destination country for people from the region looking for economic opportunities. Work in areas such as the gold and uranium mines attracts migrants from other West and Central African countries. In 2019, IOM reported that 131,892 migrants stated Niger as their final destination. Nationals from ECOWAS member states tend to migrate and settle in Niamey (35.5% of international migrants), Tillabéri (18%), and Niasso (13%), while migrants from other African countries tend to migrate and settle in Diffa (34%), Niamey (29%), and Tahoua (15%). High-skilled international migrants tend to be employed in the energy sector, while low-skilled migrants tend to be employed in the construction sector. Female international migrants tend to occupy jobs in sectors where Nigerien women are not employed, due to cultural traditions and restrictions.

In Niger, transiting across the country can be extremely time-consuming and expensive, owing to the financial costs of travelling through the Sahara Desert. Thus, it is common for migrants to pause their trip to Europe in Niger in order to earn greater income to afford the whole journey. Cities in Niger such as Agadez, Arlit, and Dirkou have become popular stopover zones for migrants looking to prepare for the remainder of their trip, and as initial places of return for expelled or stranded migrants.

### **III. Emigration and Skilled Migration**

Historically, emigration flows from Niger were predominantly those of low-skilled workers towards coastal countries in West Africa, such as Côte d'Ivoire. Since the end of the 1990s, labour emigration has largely been driven by three main factors: population-driven land scarcity, poverty, and eco-climatic change. Niger has one of the highest population growth rates in the African continent, it has the lowest human development index in the world, and it is the least resource-endowed country in the Sahel region. Poverty and resource scarcity play a major role in the decision to emigrate, as the bulk of the country's economy is dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Labour emigration is more than just an economic activity: emigrating is also an act of independence and autonomy from the head of household. The majority of emigrants from Niger find themselves in Nigeria (37.8%), Libya (12.6%), Côte d'Ivoire (12.4%), Benin (8.3%), Ghana (7.7%), Togo (5.2%), and Cameroon (3.5%). Nigerien migration towards member states of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is limited, with an estimated 3% of migrants from Niger residing in European countries. The only countries in Europe where migrants from Niger have been registered are France, Belgium, Italy, and Germany.

Nigerien emigration has traditionally been a male phenomenon, due to traditional cultural values that limit the possibilities for women to migrate on their own. In the western Nigerien region, young men make up the vast majority of labour emigrants; but in the Hausa-dominated areas in central Niger, there is greater involvement of women in emigration. Nigerien migrants tend to be low-skilled (mirroring the level of education across the country), and generally occupy jobs in the agricultural sector. Households that are larger tend to have more migrants, whereas smaller households tend to be poorer and rely on all members of their family since they have a limited ability to hire labour. Emigration from Niger is generally temporary and seasonal, corresponding to seasonal agricultural activities. In ECOWAS member states, Nigerien migrants generally stay in the country for six to seven months, while in countries outside of the region, the stay generally lasts for periods of one to

two years. According to World Bank estimates, remittances in Niger amounted to \$320,411,764 in 2019. The majority of this amount was sent from African countries.

#### **IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees)**

Given its geographical position, Niger has become a major hub for movements towards Libya, Algeria, and the Mediterranean. Due to the complex humanitarian and security crisis in Libya, Niger has become an alternative space for protection. This includes the large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees unable to reach Europe, and those being deported from Algeria onto Nigerien territory. In 2019, Niger saw an increase of 14% of people of concern seeking refuge in the country (from 386,978 to 441,899 over the course of the year). Of this total figure, 180,006 were refugees, 37,919 were asylum seekers, 191,902 were internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 32,072 were other persons of concern. Niger has offered stability and an open asylum space for asylum seekers and refugees who are fleeing conflict and persecution, with the most significant proportions coming from Libya, Mali, and Nigeria. Of the 37,919 asylum seekers, 66% were Nigerian and 32% Malian. Of the 5,768 asylum applications filed in 2018, a total of 1,571 decisions have been reached on the initial applications so far (with 100% being answered positively).

Maradi, in southern Niger, recently received an influx of 23,000 refugees from Nigeria, fleeing the on-going violence in the north-western parts of the country. Over 60,000 refugees have fled violence in that part of Nigeria to seek safety and sanctuary in Niger. This same violence and insecurity in areas bordering Nigeria have caused 19,000 Niger nationals to become displaced inside their own country. The UNHCR has worked closely with authorities in Niger to try and relocate almost 7,000 refugees to villages about 20 kilometres away from the Nigerian border. The number of IDPs in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions has increased by 44% over the past year, leaving a total of 139,780 people internally displaced.

#### **V. Victims of Human Trafficking**

The government of Niger does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but it is making significant efforts to do so. Niger is considered a Tier 2 country owing to increased efforts demonstrated by the government; with officials investigating and prosecuting more suspected traffickers and identifying more victims. The government also increased funding to the National Coordinating Commission for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons (CNCLTP) and the National Agency for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and the Illicit Transport of Migrants (ANLTP/TIM). A shelter for trafficking victims was opened and is staffed by the national government, the first of its kind in the country.

Despite being a landlocked country, Niger is still a departure, transit, and destination point for victims of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Niger is a transit country for men, women, and children from West and Central Africa through Algeria, Libya, and Morocco to Western Europe. Nigerien authorities claim to have made the fight against human trafficking a government priority, though many officials are not yet knowledgeable enough about the trafficking and smuggling of migrants. Human traffickers exploit both domestic and foreign victims in Niger, and also exploit victims from Niger abroad. Traffickers in Niger have traditionally primarily exploited Nigerien women and children, as well as those from West

and Central Africa, in sex and labour trafficking. Nigerien children are forced to labour: in the country's gold, salt, iron, and gypsum mines; in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors; and by begging in markets and at bus stations. Girls and women are sex trafficked along the border with Nigeria, and many Nigerian women becoming victims of human trafficking during their transit through Niger to North Africa.

## **VI. National Legal Framework**

Niger is party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of 1969. On a regional level, it is party to the Treaty of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its protocols as well as the Treaty on the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). Both of these instruments establish the "freedom of movement of persons, goods, services, and capital of the citizen of its member states, as well as the right of residence and establishment." Despite the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee on migration policy development in 2007 and the creation of a first policy draft document in 2014, Niger has yet to adopt a national migration policy. The Inter-Ministerial Committee in charge of the Elaboration of a National Migration Policy is placed under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior and is composed of officials from the main ministries involved in the management of migration.

The cabinet of the Prime Minister is in charge of the political response to migration and cooperates closely with the Ministry of the Interior. The three ministries that most deal with issues relating to migration are the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice hosts the national Commission and the National Agency for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons. Due to the implementation of the 2015 Law Against the Illicit Smuggling of Migrants, smuggling in persons has been added to their mandate. This law makes it illegal for non-Nigerien nationals to travel north of Agadez. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosts the Directorate General of Legal and Consular Affairs, which is responsible for travel documentation, as well as the Directorate for Nigeriens living Abroad and the High Council for Nigeriens Abroad, which are responsible for policies and programmes concerning diaspora relations.

National authorities appear to be rather flexible in their approach to dealing with irregular migration. Since irregular migration is not considered to be a major threat to Niger, the removal of foreigners is very rarely a result of their irregular migration status. Irregular migrants are generally only removed if they commit a criminal offense in the country. However, given the political instability and the existence of terrorist threats in the region, national authorities have begun removing foreigners more frequently.

## **VII. Main Actors**

### *The State*

Historically, migration within Niger has not been seen as a high priority for government. This is due to the marginal amount of the population that is involved in or affected by migration, as well as the relative urgency of other issues (such as security, regional political instability, and climate change). Governance issues such as low state capacity, economic

inequality, and corruption have resulted in the State falling short on the provision of basic services and migration management. Policies and programs have failed to address the root causes of migration, while simultaneously inflaming the causes. Niger faces several governance barriers to effective migration control, namely lack of resources, factionalism in government, impunity, and low state capacity. Many Nigeriens who emigrate believe that the government can prevent irregular migration and skilled emigration by creating alternative solutions for the vast majority of the population who are unable to find a job. Gaps in governance affect people's likelihood to migrate: weak and incapable governance produces increased migration. To engage with and address migration effectively, the Nigerien state needs to expand existing governance frameworks in order to manage new forms of human mobility and enhance the resilience of Nigerien migrants. However, despite migration mismanagement, Niger's relative stability and location have contributed to it becoming a strategic ally of the United States, in efforts of counterterrorism and stability as well as the management of migration in the region.

### *The Catholic Church*

There are roughly 16,000 Catholics in Niger, which is divided into two dioceses: the Diocese of Maradi and the much larger Diocese of Niamey. The Catholic Relief Services' Action for the Protection and Integration of Migration in West Africa (APIMA), works to ensure safe migration by targeting youth, returned migrants, migrants in transit, and community members from the Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. CRS has worked with church partners targeting youth before their departure and upon their return. CRS likewise tries to reduce the stigmas associated with migrants returning to their communities of origin and support their reintegration. CRS works in West Africa to provide economic activities and protection with the following objectives: to create economic opportunities for youth at home, to provide youth with the skills necessary to gain and retain employment, to connect youth with local businesses and employers, to connect migrants and returned migrants to service providers to help meet their basic needs, to provide trauma awareness and resilience training to migrants in transit and upon return, and to organize conversations with migrants, community members, and government officials on safe migration practices. In Niger, the communities of Agadez and Niamey have been served by CRS.

Caritas Développement Niger (CADEV) is one of the main humanitarian organisations in the country. It was established in 1962 as Caritas Niger and then restructured and finally established and recognised as an NGO by the Niger government in 2005. Historically, CADEV has worked to implement the pastoral care of the Church among the most vulnerable and to promote Islamic-Christian dialogue and coexistence. Recently, CADEV has extended its emergency and development projects, with a particular focus on the fight against food insecurity, in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, CADEV has been trying to provide parishes, communities, schools, and health centres with the necessary means to maintain hygiene measures and to avoid the spread of the virus, particularly in the Archdiocese of Niamey and the Diocese of Maradi, located in the two largest cities of the country.

Finally, the Society of African Missionaries (SAM) has been present since the 1990s, carrying out activities to aid the most vulnerable, including children, migrants, and refugees. Among

the main objectives of the Catholic Mission is human development through education, health, justice, peace, integration, and interreligious dialogue.

### *International Organisations*

Core international organisations that have drastically increased their presence in Niger in recent years are the IOM and the UNHCR. IOM works with the Government of Niger and other relevant partners on the implementation of the anti-smuggling law, the development of an action plan on how to combat smuggling, and the provision of training to law enforcement and the judiciary. IOM also provides the Government and its different branches and agencies with capacity building and expertise in the different fields of migration. In order to support the Government in the development of a comprehensive national strategy on migration, IOM collects and analyses data on migration through profiling, providing counselling and direct assistance, and assisting with voluntary return to countries of origin. IOM works in the whole of the ECOWAS region, promoting regional cross-border cooperation, increased coordination, and information exchange between border agencies. They have opened up five open-type transit centres for migrants in Arlit, Dirkou, Agadez, and Niamey. Accommodation occurs on a voluntary basis, and the main condition for being accommodated is a willingness to voluntarily return home. The main assistance provided at these centres is food, water, shelter, health and psychosocial assistance, and assistance with travel documents.

The UNHCR operation in Niger is managed by 416 staff in 8 different locations. While UNHCR continues to be focused on delivering aid to those most in need, the organisation is becoming increasingly involved with the Government and other relevant stakeholders in order to augment and improve coordination. Due to rising insecurity along the borders of Niger, the numbers of internally displaced persons has sharply increased. With the support of the European Union, UNHCR constructed 2,164 social houses for the most vulnerable refugees and Nigeriens in the Diffa region. UNHCR and the Government of Niger have worked together to develop a joint strategy to close camps in the Tillabéri region in order to support the socioeconomic integration of Malian refugees into the country. UNHCR also manages multiple refugee camps and is strongly engaged with the Government of Niger, NGO partners, and the World Bank to create development-oriented interventions and foster economic recovery and long-term solutions through urbanization and the construction of sustainable housing.

### *Other Organisations*

The “Protection of Migrants: Justice, Human Rights, and Migrant Smuggling” (PROMIS) project was established in Niger in 2018. It is a joint initiative between the West Africa Regional Office of UN Human Rights and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime that aims to strengthen the fight against the smuggling of migrants in West Africa. The Regional Office of UN Human Rights has worked to try and strengthen the capacity and capability of Niger to develop a human rights-based approach to the smuggling of migrants. The Office aims to “conduct assessment missions on migrants’ rights, provide technical and legal assistance to national human rights institutions, paralegal/legal institutions and civil



society actors, and provide grants to civil society organizations working on migrants' human rights."

### **VIII. Other Issues**

Niger is among many other states in the Sahel region that saw a significant resurgence of extremist violence in 2019. Boko Haram's violent insurgency managed to spread from north-eastern Nigeria to communities in Niger, which suffered more than 1,100 deaths in the twelve months prior to July 18, 2020. There is particular instability in the Tillabéri region near Niger's borders with Mali and Burkina Faso, and the Diffa region near the Lake Chad Basin. The Head of the United Nations Office for West African and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, declared that despite efforts by the governments of the concerned countries, violent extremists continue to attack security forces and civilians, forcing children to fight in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria.

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