

HUMAN SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING ECOSYSTEMS
– NORTH AFRICA AND THE SAHEL

2023 SERIES



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

A photograph showing a group of approximately 15-20 people, mostly men, sitting on the back of a white truck. They are in a dusty, arid environment with some sparse trees and buildings in the background. The people are dressed in simple, practical clothing, some wearing head coverings. The truck is parked on a dirt road with visible tire tracks. The overall scene suggests a transit point for migrants or smuggled goods.

NIGER

REGIONAL MIGRATION AND GOLD
MINING CONSOLIDATE AS SMUGGLING
TO LIBYA STAGNATES

Alice Fereday

JULY 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is part of a series of briefs published by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)'s Observatory of Illicit Economies in North Africa and the Sahel. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all those who contributed to and shared their knowledge for this research. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the dedicated efforts of local researchers engaged by the GI-TOC across the region. While we will not name them for their safety, they have our profound gratitude and respect for the excellent work they do under difficult circumstances.

This brief would also not have been possible without the support and advice of Mark Micallef and Matt Herbert, and the entire North Africa and the Sahel observatory team. The GI-TOC's Publications and Communications teams have also been key collaborators, ensuring that the exacting standards of delivery are met.

The research for this report was supported by funding under the North Africa and the Sahel, and Lake Chad windows of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the GI-TOC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Fereday is a senior analyst at the GI-TOC. She researches organized crime dynamics in the Sahel region, and the links between illicit economies, conflict and stability, with a focus on human smuggling and trafficking in Niger and Chad. Alice also has several years' experience in armed conflict mediation, designing and implementing conflict management actions through dialogue and negotiation in southern Libya and the broader Sahel region. She holds a degrees from City University London, Université Panthéon Sorbonne and Université Paris Dauphine.

© 2023 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Global Initiative.

Cover: © GI-TOC

Design and layout: Ink Design Publishing Solutions, Cape Town

Please direct inquiries to:

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Avenue de France 23
Geneva, CH-1202
Switzerland
www.globalinitiative.net

CONTENTS

- Introduction..... 2**
 - Methodology..... 3
- Dynamics shaping the migration context in Niger..... 5**
 - Rising external and internal security challenges impact smugglers and migrants..... 8
 - Armed banditry continues to rise across the north 10
- Key human smuggling trends consolidate in 2022 14**
 - Movement of foreign migrants to Algeria continues to grow..... 14
 - Movement of foreign migrants to Libya remains limited 17
 - Nigerien circular migration to Libya remains robust 20
- Expulsions and build-up of migrants fuel tensions in northern Niger..... 22**
- Conclusion..... 30**
- Notes 32



INTRODUCTION

Niger's role as a transit country for sub-Saharan migrants heading to Libya has been under intense scrutiny in recent years and the focus of significant international efforts to curb these movements since 2015.¹ However, largely as a result of these efforts – including the adoption by the government of Niger, under EU pressure, of a 2015 law criminalizing human smuggling – the number of migrants transiting Niger drastically decreased. Human smuggling routes in the country also shifted, in many cases resulting in longer, costlier and more dangerous journeys for those still choosing to travel.² Although Niger is no longer the regional irregular migration hub it once was, human smuggling dynamics remain a significant component of illicit economies in the country as they continue to adapt and respond to demand for mobility.

In 2022, human smuggling dynamics were characterized by the consolidation of trends that have emerged over the last two years, such as the shift of *passeurs* – the colloquial name in the Sahel for transporters involved in human smuggling – towards the transport of Nigerien migrants and gold miners, the displacement of human smuggling routes from Agadez to more remote areas, and the exacerbation of armed banditry attacks across northern Niger.³

The most significant trend relates to the continued decline of demand for human smuggling among foreign migrants travelling through Niger to Libya. In part, this is due to a growing preference by migrants traversing Niger for travel northward via Algeria, despite the difficulty of crossing the Algerian border on foot. However, demand for travel to Libya has also been impacted by continued security force pressure on foreign migrants in key hubs and routes in north-central Niger. As a result, transport of foreign migrants to Libya has been displaced to remote routes east of Agadez, where sophisticated smuggling operations involving Nigerian, Nigerien and Libyan *passeurs* have developed. Nonetheless, these networks represent a fraction of the former smuggling capacity in the north of Niger.

In turn, most networks in Agadez have reorganized to cater for Nigeriens journeying to Libya for seasonal work, rather than foreign migrants – a less lucrative but safer activity. The number of Nigeriens travelling to Libya each year following seasonal migration patterns appears to be steadily rising, due in part to diminished livelihoods in Niger, continued demand for unskilled labour in Libya and the ease of access to affordable travel to Libya.

Continued demand for travel to goldfields in the north in recent years has also provided alternative income sources for *passeurs*, who have turned to the transport of miners as well as trade and auxiliary services around the goldfields. Departures from Agadez and Arlit to the Djado and Tchibarakatene goldfields, respectively, now represent a key livelihood for *passeurs*.

However, gold miners in Djado and Tchibarakatene were increasingly targeted by armed banditry in mid- to late 2022, with multiple attacks on military-escorted gold convoys on routes linking the goldfields to Agadez and Arlit, respectively, as well as attacks on individual vehicles and commercial buses transporting gold miners. These attacks are consistent with a broader rise in armed banditry across northern Niger, where attacks have increasingly affected smuggling activities. In addition to Chadian armed groups operating across more remote stretches of northern Niger, the Algerian, Libyan and Chadian borders, and areas surrounding the goldfields, attacks by local bandits have been taking place closer to Agadez and along the main road to Dirkou – despite the weekly military convoy, which is meant to protect those traveling this route.

The involvement of local youth in banditry and petty crime is likely to persist across northern Niger in the medium- to long-term, as the collapse of the human smuggling economy and nation-wide economic contraction have further diminished formal employment opportunities.

Methodology

This brief is based on the GI-TOC's field monitoring system. During 2022 – the reporting period for this study – field researchers in the region collected data through semi-structured interviews with smugglers, migrants, community members, transporters, gold miners, local authorities, NGO personnel, security personnel and others.

Open-source data relevant to human smuggling and trafficking was systematically collected and analyzed on a weekly basis. This data was used to formulate questions and inquiry areas for field research and validate field interviews collected by researchers.

Care has been taken to triangulate the information. However, the issues detailed in this brief are inherently opaque and the geographic areas covered often remote, volatile or difficult to access. Because of this, the brief should be viewed as a snapshot that will feed into future reporting and analysis from the GI-TOC that is planned to capture the rapidly evolving dynamics in Niger and the broader region.



© Souleymane Ag Anara/AFP via Getty Images



DYNAMICS SHAPING THE MIGRATION CONTEXT IN NIGER

Although northbound and circular movements through Niger are rooted in historic regional mobility dynamics, they are also impacted and shaped by the political, security and economic context in which they take place.

Niger faces a number of socio-economic challenges. According to the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index, the country is the third least developed in the world, behind only Chad and South Sudan.⁴ According to World Bank data, 41.8% of the country's 26 million citizens were living in extreme poverty in 2021.⁵ Agro-pastoral activity remains the largest economic sector, representing around 40% of GDP and employing up to 85% of the population. However, recent years have been marked by poor agricultural production levels due to disrupted seasonal rainfall. Repeated poor harvests combined with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led GDP growth to drop from 7.2% in 2019 to 1.4% in 2021.⁶

The country's growth rebounded sharply in 2022, in part due to a successful harvest. However, 2022 also saw the country's population financially strained by rising inflation, with the price of key commodities, such as wheat, fuel and crop fertilizer, rising sharply due to the conflict in Ukraine. For instance, multiple interviewees flagged that a 50-kilogram bag of flour that had cost FCFA20 000 (€30.40) in 2020 and 2021 jumped to FCFA30 000 (€45.70) in 2022. Rising prices were exacerbated by Algeria's ban on the re-export of imported commodities such as sugar, pasta, oil, semolina and all wheat derivatives, imposed as Algiers itself grappled with its own shortages resulting from the Ukraine crisis.⁷ The ban had a particularly acute impact in Arlit and the broader Agadez region, with populations in both areas depending heavily – and almost entirely for wheat flour – on Algerian imports.

As a result of these compounded factors, Niger faced a food insecurity crisis in 2022, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies who assessed that 4.4 million people were in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.⁸

There have been some large-scale initiatives to improve the economic situation in the country. Niger's US\$29.6 billion 2022–2026 development plan aims to reverse the economic contraction in part through investments in the country's oil extraction sector, with the planned construction of Africa's longest pipeline to transport crude oil from the eastern region of Agadem to Benin – a project that Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum hopes will increase oil sales fivefold.⁹

There are no clear indications that recent economic and agricultural difficulties have driven a noticeable increase in the outflow of migrants from Niger to Europe. However, it is likely that it has heightened Nigerien circular migration to Libya, as well as involvement in informal economic activities, in particular artisanal gold mining.

Gold mining has played a significant role in compensating for poor livelihood opportunities in northern Niger, in particular since the discovery of gold deposits after 2014. The discovery of gold triggered a rush of miners from Sahelian and sub-Saharan states, including Nigeriens, Chadians and Sudanese experienced in gold mining.¹⁰ Traders also headed to the gold sites to cater to a rising demand for food, water, fuel, coal, tools, vehicles and machinery. Many Nigeriens therefore found alternative livelihoods in and around northern Niger's goldfields, either in mining itself or in the auxiliary service economy that developed alongside it.¹¹

Since 2016 many human smugglers in Agadez have turned to activities linked to gold mining, including shuttling miners to the goldfields or transportation of sundry commodities there. Although government crackdowns on migrant smuggling in the wake of a 2016 anti-smuggling law have played a key role in this, they have not been the only factor, with the COVID-19-linked slowdown in migration, for example, leading many *passeurs* to turn towards the goldfields to cope.¹² Further, some *passeurs* also turned to transport to the goldfields because human smuggling between Niger and Libya is becoming increasingly logistically complicated and fragile, with payment risks at multiple points. As a Nigerien *passeur* told the GI-TOC:

The first problem we encounter is that they give you the fuel money only once you arrive in Libya; there is the boss who is waiting for you to give you the fuel money. You only receive your money when you reach Libya. If people don't pay you, you have to take them to the *gidan bashi* ['debt house' in Hausa] to register them there and have them kept. We abandoned the transport of people who leave for Libya to go to Djado. Now we only do Agadez to Djado for gold mining.¹³

The Djado goldfield (located 630 kilometres north-east of Agadez), the largest artisanal goldfield in Niger, was closed by the government in 2017, but gold mining resumed there in 2019 and has been largely tolerated since.¹⁴ Today, smuggling to and from the goldfield provides an alternative livelihood to many *passeurs* transporting both Nigerien and foreign passengers. Between 50 and 60 *passeurs* reportedly operate between Agadez and Djado. According to *passeurs*, between 250 and 450 people travelled to Djado each week during the reporting period, transported mostly by individual drivers but also aboard trucks carrying food, water and equipment to the goldfield.

In addition to its role as an economic centre, the Djado goldfield also acts as a transit hub for small numbers of migrants planning to travel onwards to Libya. While some foreigners only aim to work in gold mining, others travel first to Djado to earn money, and then use those funds to pay for the remaining leg of their journey to Libya.

Transport costs vary depending on payment method, as travelling on credit to Djado is commonplace, mainly for Nigerien workers who cannot afford to pay upfront. However, this form of indentured-labour agreement makes workers and migrants vulnerable to exploitation and forms of human trafficking.¹⁵

Migrants and gold miners in Djado also face security risks, as the area is frequently targeted by bandits and, on one recent occasion, armed rebel groups. On 15 June 2022, the rebel group Union des Forces Patriotiques pour la Refondation de la République (Union of Patriotic Forces for the Rebuilding of the Republic) attacked a gendarmerie unit near Djado,¹⁶ but this does not appear to have had a significant



A gold miner working in the Djado goldfield, the largest artisanal field in Niger, June 2022. *Photo: GI-TOC*

impact on gold mining and smuggling activities. On the other hand, attacks by armed bandits on gold convoys and individual gold miners are frequent and have a significant impact on those involved.

Similar human smuggling dynamics take place around the Tchibarakatene goldfield (located 530 kilometres north of Agadez), although Tchibarakatene is rarely used as a transit point for migrants heading to Libya or Algeria, as it does not provide easy – or safe – access to either country.

Located only 375 kilometres south of Tchibarakatene, Arlit is the nearest and most easily accessible town for gold miners and therefore hosts a large number of workers heading to or from the mines. This provides a steady pool of passengers for drivers operating on these routes, many of whom have turned away from the transport of foreign migrants to Libya. Between 100 and 150 *passieurs* reportedly operated between Arlit and Tchibarakatene, transporting between 750 and 1 250 people approximately per week in late 2022.

Arlit's proximity to the Tchibarakatene field and its role as a transit point for gold miners have been largely beneficial to the local economy, with thousands of workers arriving in the town requiring accommodation, food, water, equipment and services. However, the influx of gold miners into the town has also caused some concern among local communities, who blame new arrivals for an uptick in criminality, violence and 'depravity'.

In northern Niger, the contraction of the human smuggling economy since 2016, combined with the effects of the economic decline, have contributed to diminished livelihoods. Overall, gold mining in Djado and Tchibarakatene continues to provide livelihoods to thousands of Nigeriens and foreigners, both in mining itself and in the various auxiliary economic activities servicing the fields.¹⁷ This has to a degree buffered the regional population from both the broader economic challenges faced by Niger, as well as the more localized economic challenges posed by the government's crackdown on the smuggling of foreign migrants. Although steps to regulate artisanal gold mining in northern Niger remain limited, this sector has substantial potential for regularization and expansion.¹⁸

Rising external and internal security challenges impact smugglers and migrants

In addition to socio-economic challenges, Niger is also facing rising external and internal security threats. The most visible and widely focused upon threat involves the sharp deterioration of security in areas of Mali and Burkina Faso bordering Niger. There, two violent extremist groups, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) have expanded control and influence, effectively contesting government presence over a broad swath of the central Sahel. These groups have some presence in Niger's south-western regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua. Another set of violent extremist groups, including the Islamic State in the West African Province and Boko Haram, who mainly operate in north-eastern Nigeria and Cameroon, have also driven a degradation in security in south-eastern Niger.

Over the course of 2022, the security situation continued to deteriorate, especially in the south-western regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua, bordering Mali and Burkina Faso, as well the south-eastern Diffa region, bordering Nigeria and Chad. Violence in these areas has resulted in high numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and asylum seekers, which reached 361 593 and 302 056 people respectively by January 2023.¹⁹ IDPs in Niger typically do not have the means or capacity to journey to Libya, although further research is needed to assess potential movement patterns among these groups.

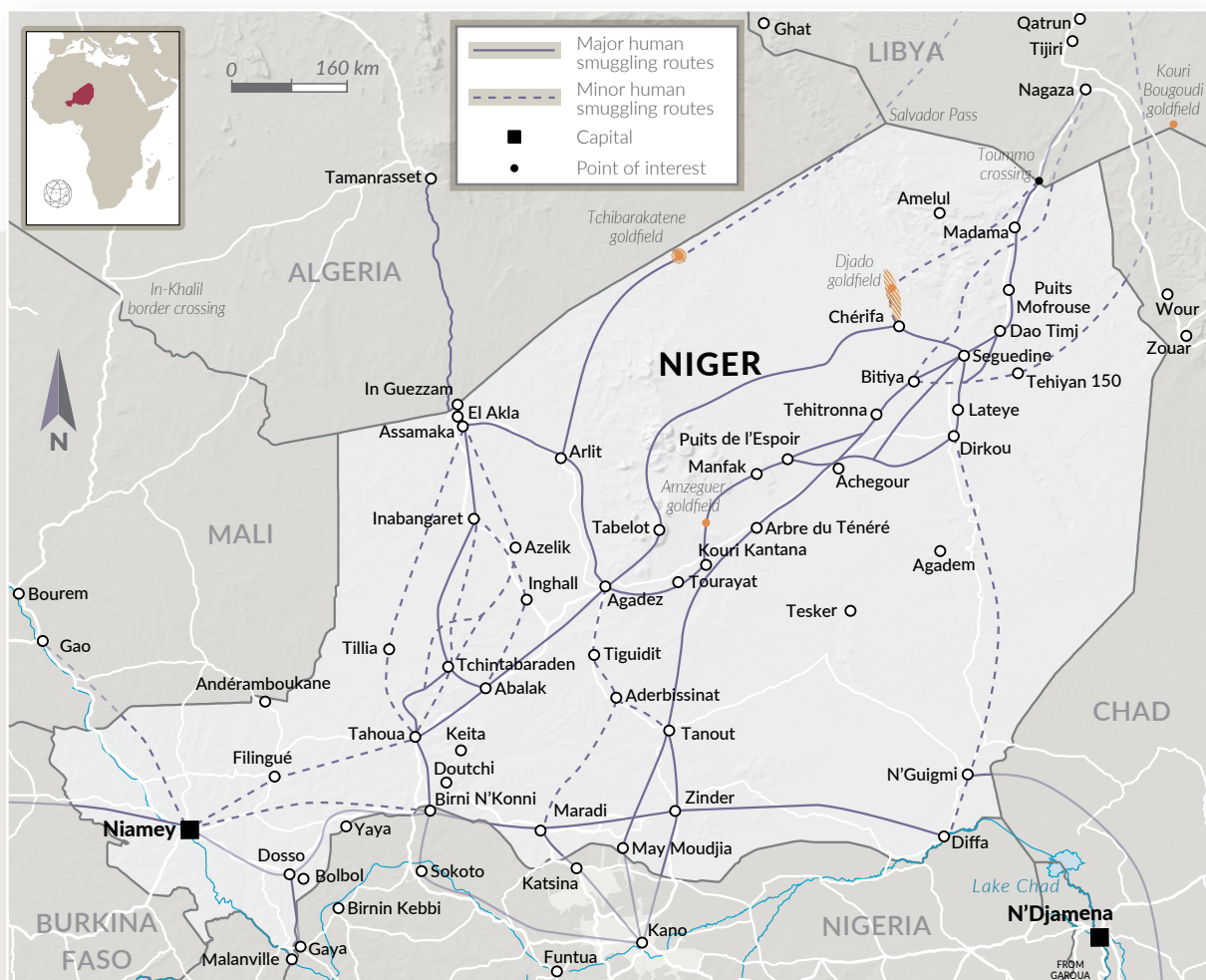


FIGURE 1 Human smuggling routes through Niger, 2022.



A clandestine bypass route used by smugglers near Bitiya, January 2022. Photo: GI-TOC

The deteriorating regional security environment has had a practical impact on migration from West African countries. The flow of migrants entering Niger from Burkina Faso, for instance, has been significantly affected by rising insecurity.²⁰ Insecurity in south-western Niger and northern Burkina Faso has worsened in 2022, leading to significant disruptions to, and increased risks on, routes between the two countries. These routes are typically used by Burkinabé migrants intending to travel north through Niger to Libya or Algeria, as well as migrants from other West African countries. Most use public transport from their country of origin to reach Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, as regional routes are well serviced by commercial bus operators.

The route previously used by bus companies between Ouagadougou and Niamey, via Kantchari, was closed in 2021 due to threats by JNIM, with buses now travelling further north via Dori and Téra. However, this route passes through another high-risk area within the tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, where violent extremist groups have strengthened their presence in recent years. These groups have now begun to target civilians travelling by public transport, with multiple attacks on buses travelling between Ouagadougou and Niamey taking place in 2022. On 16 March 2022, for instance, an attack targeted a commercial bus travelling on this route, killing the bus driver, 18 passengers and two security-force personnel.²¹ Several additional attacks have taken place since, including on 19 May 2022, when a 15-year-old passenger was killed, and 11 others injured.²²

One Burkinabé migrant, who travelled on this route in April 2022 on his way to Europe, explained he was not aware of the dangers until he approached the Nigerien border: 'That's when I knew that the road is not easy. There are attacks and terrorists everywhere. It is towards there that there are problems. Arriving there I found the situation strange, with small villages, people left their village, the village is empty. I was scared. We saw the burned cars among which there are military vehicles and civilian vehicles [...]. I was so scared.'²³

Several bus companies suspended operations on this route in 2022, but departures continue in the absence of safer alternatives on what is now the only land connection between Burkina Faso and Niger, and a vital regional migration route. Local passengers and migrants continue to face high risks.

Armed banditry continues to rise across the north

Although violent extremist groups, such as JNIM and IS Sahel, are the most acute and visible threat to security in Niger, the main public security challenge in the north of the country comes from armed bandit groups. Although banditry is not new, increasing attacks in the far north-east of Niger, on main roads connecting Agadez to Dirkou and along bypass routes used by *passeurs*, represents an additional threat to stability and migrant safety.²⁴

There are two general types of bandits. Many are former mercenaries, composed of members of the Zaghawa community from eastern Chad. They have substantial combat experience from fighting in Libya, as well as ample hardware and vehicles acquired from the conflict, providing them with the capacity to operate across vast areas between northern Chad, northern Niger and southern Libya. Several groups of ex-mercenaries have rebased themselves in southern Libya – in particular, at the Kouri Bougoudi goldfield, which straddles the Chad–Libya border – from where they engage in predatory activities across northern Niger. Since October 2020, they have increasingly been leveraging these advantages to consolidate their involvement in illicit activities in the central Sahara, as their mercenary activities in Libya became more uncertain after the ceasefire in Libya.²⁵

The second typology of bandits, typically Nigeriens, have local roots. In mid to late 2022, there was an increase in attacks by groups that fit this profile operating along main roads between Agadez and Libya, in contrast to more remote areas and routes that are targeted by Chadian bandits.

Human smuggling activities have been increasingly affected by these attacks. Over the past year there has been a reported rise in the number of incidents in which *passeurs* operating between Niger and Libya have been targeted. This has been sustained throughout 2022. One of the most significant incidents occurred in January 2021, when a group of 12 Pakistani migrants were kidnapped by Chadian bandits while travelling via the Kouri Kantana route.

However, in addition to rising banditry in the desert, the main roads around Agadez and leading to Dirkou have also been the target of increasing attacks by local criminal groups.²⁶

In some cases, bandits will not only steal cash, valuables and mobile phones, they will also take *passeurs'* vehicles, leaving them stranded along with their passengers. For instance, between Agadez and Toureyet (located 100 kilometres north-east of Agadez), two attacks reportedly took place in the afternoon of 19 July 2022, one of them seven kilometres from the exit barrier of Agadez and the other 12 kilometres away, just before the departure of the official military convoy from Dirkou. In both attacks, conducted by the same armed bandits, two Toyota Hilux pickup vehicles belonging to *passeurs* and used to transport migrants were taken. The bandits abandoned the *passeurs* and their passengers at the scene of the attacks.

Further afield, near Bir Tawil (located 350 kilometres north-east of Agadez), three attacks reportedly took place on 27 July 2022, during which armed bandits seized three vehicles, including a high-value 2012/14 Toyota V8, a Toyota Tundra and a Toyota Hilux, all used for the transport of migrants. Two of the attacks took place without violence, but the third resulted in the deaths of two Egyptian migrants when the bandits opened fire on the *passeur's* vehicle as he attempted to flee.

According to several interviewees, local bandits became increasingly active in the second half of 2021. Some groups operate in a specific area along the main road near a location called Plaque 50, 300 kilometres north-east of Agadez. The bandits typically aim to steal vehicles, fuel and goods. The rise of banditry activity could be linked in part to the decline of local livelihoods in recent years, in particular since the criminalization of human smuggling. However, it is unlikely that these local bandits have the operational capacity of Chadian bandits, as they do not have the same combat experience or revenue, and they mainly target individual vehicles to steal cash, valuables, gold and the vehicles themselves, as opposed to large convoys transporting high-value commodities such as drugs transiting the far northern areas.

Notably, the bandits are not deterred by the presence of military personnel, and regularly target vehicles travelling with the military convoy between Agadez and Dirkou. With dozens of vehicles joining the convoy each week, bandits are able to enter the convoy discreetly and force vehicles to stop in order to either hijack the vehicle or steal its contents and cash. On 16 April 2022, a bandit was reportedly captured by the Nigerien military near Plaque 50, after the group inserted itself in the military convoy between Dirkou and Agadez.²⁷

In some cases, the bandits clash with military forces. Two members of the Nigerien military were killed in an attack near Plaque 50 on 8 April 2022. The group of off-duty military personnel were travelling to Agadez in a rented vehicle when they were attacked by the armed bandits, who are likely to have mistaken them for civilians.²⁸ The clash left two dead and four critically injured among the Nigerien military. The number of casualties among the bandits is unknown, but they were reportedly able to escape and remain at large.

The rise of banditry poses both stability risks in northern Niger and substantial safety risks to migrants traveling through the area. Interviewees have indicated that attacks can lead to migrants being abandoned in the desert:

Smugglers have two main choices if they encounter armed bandits. The first [...] is to take the risk of fleeing, while being pursued by the [armed bandits] who shoot at them with live ammunition. The second choice depends mainly on the means of transport of the smugglers or the distance between them and the armed bandits. If they are convinced that they could not escape, the first thing to do is to hide their satellite phones ... and stop. The bandits will carry out the searches before taking the vehicle and abandoning the smuggler in the middle of the desert with their passengers. Thus, some smugglers who are victims of theft and are abandoned in the desert with a satellite phone that they were able to hide call their relatives to be rescued by giving the GPS coordinates of where they are.²⁹

The interviewee also noted that victims of banditry attacks who are close to main roads are sometimes rescued by passers-by. However, attacks that leave smugglers – and their passengers – stranded far from main roads without satellite phones often result in fatalities.

In addition to increasing threats to migrants, the latter half of 2022 also saw a sharp uptick in attacks targeting gold miners and gold convoys. These appear to involve mainly Chadian groups operating around goldfields, but some attacks on main roads linking goldfields to Arlit or Agadez, or in Agadez itself, have also been attributed to local bandits.



Nigerien military capture a bandit following an attempted attack on the Agadez–Dirkou convoy, 16 April 2022. Photo: Tadress24info Facebook page

The most noteworthy incident took place on 29 January 2022, when a convoy of the National Guard that was escorting a shipment of gold between Djado and Agadez was attacked. It is commonplace for gold-site owners to pool resources and pay for a military convoy to escort shipments to Agadez. In the incident, a total of 122 kilograms of gold were reportedly stolen, worth around FCFA3 billion (€4.5 million).³⁰

The attack sparked tensions between the owners of the gold and local authorities, and a protest was held in Agadez to demand further explanation and compensation for the loss. In March, 15 people – including military officers and civilians – were arrested in connection with the attack.³¹ However, the identity of the attackers remains unknown.

Gold convoys from Tchibarakatene have also been affected by a recent surge in banditry attacks. Although this is not a new phenomenon, such incidents appear to be multiplying and spreading across northern Niger, whereas they had mainly taken place in the far north-west of the Agadez region in recent years.

On 23 August 2022, a heavily armed group attacked a convoy of gold miners travelling from the Tchibarakatene goldfield to Agadez.³² Despite this convoy also being escorted by the Nigerien military, the attackers were able to stop the vehicles and take an unknown quantity of gold and cash. The number of casualties remains unknown, but sources indicate injuries and vehicle damage on both sides following an exchange of gunfire. The identity of the attackers has not been confirmed, although local sources accuse Chadian bandits of the attack.

In addition to targeting gold convoys escorted by the Nigerien military, bandits have also attacked individuals transporting gold. On 29 September 2022, a commercial bus operated by Sonitrav was attacked 47 kilometres from Agadez on the Agadez–Tahoua road.³³ A group of eight bandits in two vehicles reportedly stopped the bus and forced passengers to hand over any valuables. According to local sources, the bandits appeared to have had knowledge that several passengers were transporting gold, indicating that the attack was carefully prepared with the aim of stealing gold specifically.

Over six kilograms of gold were reportedly stolen, worth approximately FCFA200 million (€304 898). Around FCFA800 000 (€1 219) in cash was also stolen, alongside mobile phones.

The modus operandi of this incident closely resembles that of an attack on 8 October 2022, when a banditry group attacked a vehicle in the town centre of Agadez and stole 12 kilograms of gold.³⁴ According to local sources, the attackers were aware of the shipment, and had knowledge of the timing and route used by the individual, who was travelling to Agadez airport in order to transport the gold to Niamey using a commercial flight.

Long-term solutions, including improved formalization of gold mining in northern Niger, allowing for formal regulation of gold-mining activities, and strengthened security and law enforcement presence, are necessary to durably address security issues at and surrounding goldfields. However, securing such a vast stretch of territory so far from any major cities and that intersects with long-standing drug trafficking routes near the Algerian, Libyan and Chadian borders would be very challenging for the Nigerien military, which is already heavily engaged in the fight against violent extremist groups in south-west and south-east Niger. It is also likely that the effective formalization of gold mining in Djado in particular is still impeded in part by the perception by national authorities that gold mining in Djado could feed into insecurity in northern Niger.

In the meantime, armed banditry is likely to continue to expand across north-western Niger and could – as has been the case on routes to Libya – evolve towards targeting human smuggling activities, in addition to gold and drug convoys, putting migrants at risk of attacks and kidnaps for ransom.



KEY HUMAN SMUGGLING TRENDS CONSOLIDATE IN 2022

Despite an increasingly challenging regional and domestic security environment, irregular migration through Niger continued in 2022. However, the routing shifted in comparison to previous years, with most non-Nigerien migrants moving through Niger to Algeria, rather than to Libya.

Movement of foreign migrants to Algeria continues to grow

Although these routes to Algeria are not new, the number of migrants traveling along them has steadily risen after the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. The reasons for this shift remain opaque, however they are likely to hinge on livelihood and security differences between Algeria and Libya. A Nigerian migrant who had lived in both Algeria and Libya said:

When I was in Algeria, I earned up to FCFA200 000 [€305] per month in a company. When I arrived in Libya, I never did a job that exceeds FCFA50 000 [€72] per month. [...] This is the first time that I arrived in Libya [...]. I do not want to go back [to Algeria], but I intend to go because I had the satisfaction there, but here in Libya there are problems when you're not Libyan. Libya is a country that has problems that are not new. There are too many conflicts. You see teenagers everywhere with guns in their hands.³⁵

The rise in movement to Algeria has shifted the geography of migrant travel to the west. Former hubs, such as Agadez, have seen a decline in human smuggling activities, while towns such as Tahoua – 370 kilometres east of Niamey and halfway on the road from Niamey to Agadez – have seen smuggling networks boom.

Tahoua first emerged as a significant transit hub in 2019 and owes its popularity to several factors: its accessibility to other transport hubs, its relative proximity to Algeria and the decline of smuggling activity in established centres such as Agadez, largely due to the post-2016 smuggling crackdown there. By 2021, Tahoua had grown substantially in importance, with the number of migrants transiting the city, most of them travelling to Algeria, surging far beyond pre-COVID levels.

The growth, however, has not been continuous. A temporary lull was recorded between late 2021 and early 2022, because of security force pressure. *Passeurs* reported at the time that undercover security forces in the city were targeting bus stations, which had a substantial impact given that most migrants use public transport to reach Tahoua from other cities in Niger and wait at bus stations to be collected by smugglers for their onward journey to Algeria. Security forces also infiltrated and disrupted human smuggling networks. Heightened security force pressure led the number of migrants travelling from Tahoua to Algeria to drop from a roughly 350–700 per week to 50 in December.

In early 2022 security enforcement ebbed and the number of migrants moving via Tahoua, and on to Algeria, began to rise, reaching 150 by mid-autumn. One *passeur* told the GI-TOC that he believed the easing of restrictions was linked to the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine: 'We have noticed here in Tahoua an abandonment or weakening of migration-related restrictions since the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, which means that since February 2022, people have been travelling and smuggling networks are not too disrupted. But despite this observation, everything is done [with] discretion and absolute caution.'³⁶ Several contacts in Tahoua also perceived this slackening to be the result of reduced pressure to tackle migration from the EU, which was regarded as being preoccupied with the Ukraine crisis.

However, it is more likely that the reduced security checks in Tahoua are simply linked to the nature of anti-smuggling operations in Niger, which often involve a temporary uptick in security checks, patrols and arrests aimed at dismantling networks. Owing to limited resources and competing security priorities, such initiatives are typically not sustained over the long term.

The loosening of security checks also affected the way departures were organized in Tahoua. *Passeurs* in the area have a history of adapting their modus operandi according to evolving levels of restrictions. In 2019, migrants were housed in 'ghettos' by their *coxeurs* (those in charge of organizing their travel with *passeurs*). Migrants would typically wait there for several days, until the *coxeurs* had gathered enough migrants for the onward journey. Beginning in February 2021, however, these 'ghettos' fell out of use. This was due to a decrease in waiting times for migrants and smugglers, owing to the high level of arrivals at that time.

The arrest of one of Tahoua's most important smugglers, known as 'Abdelaziz', in 2019 resulted in higher levels of caution among remaining smuggling networks, who stopped housing migrants on their property and required them to spend the night at the bus station. Interviewed *passeurs* indicated that, beginning in February 2022, some have once more begun to house migrants who arrive in Tahoua while they wait for enough passengers to organize a departure. This is due to reduced risks of police raids and checks, but also because of the fewer numbers of migrants transiting Tahoua compared to the previous year, meaning that waiting times are longer. However, some *passeurs* also claimed that they were able to organize departures within a few hours of a migrant's arrival in Tahoua.

In 2022, the price of the journey from Tahoua to Tamanrasset also decreased, falling from between FCFA100 000 and FCFA150 000 (€152–€228) to between FCFA90 000 and FCFA120 000 (€137–€183). This is likely to be another consequence of the easing of restrictions, which allowed journeys to take place with fewer risks of interceptions.

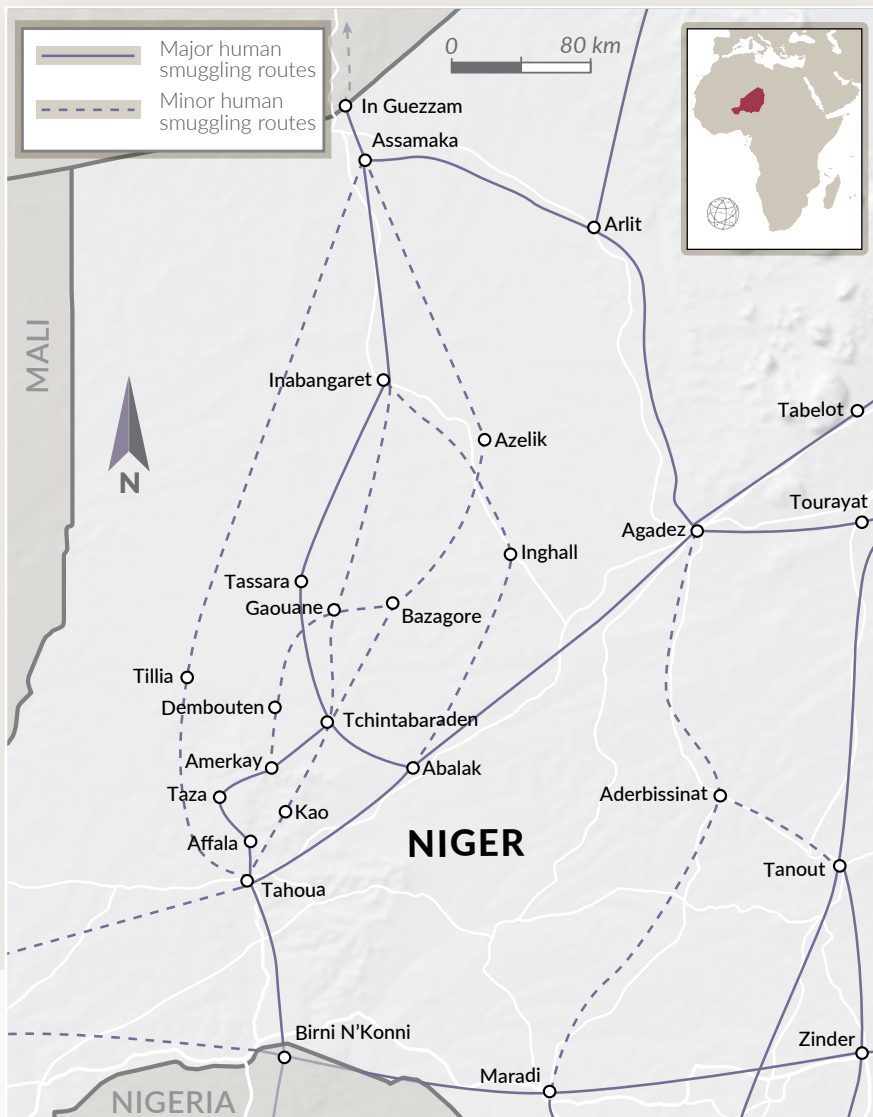


FIGURE 2 Routes from Tahoua to Algeria.

Nonetheless, journeys from Tahoua to Algeria remained clandestine and discreet. *Passeurs* bypass police checkpoints on the outskirts of Tahoua by using alternative roads and leaving under the cover of darkness. Besides a few remote villages, there are very few major towns between Tahoua and Assamaka, the main border-crossing point into Algeria. *Passeurs* using routes via Tchintabaraden, located 135 kilometres north of Tahoua, or Inghall, 115 kilometres west of Agadez, will detour around the towns entirely by taking desert pathways on either side.

Several different routes are still used between Tahoua and the Algerian border:

- Tahoua – Affala – Taza – Amerkay – Tchintabaraden – Tassara – Inabangaret – Assamaka
- Tahoua – Abalak – Tchintabaraden – Tassara – Inabangaret – Assamaka
- Tahoua – Abalak – Inghall – Inabangaret – Assamaka
- Tahoua – Kao – Tchintabaraden – Tassara – Inabangaret – Assamaka
- Tahoua – Kao – Tchintabaraden – Bazagore – Azelik – Assamaka
- Tahoua – Tilla – Assamaka

On arrival close to Assamaka, most *passeurs* avoid entering the town itself, and instead head to a remote location a few kilometres from the Algerian border, where migrants disembark and continue on foot. Algeria's border with Niger has been nominally closed since 2013 and is fortified by a two-to-four-metre-high sand berm. Once migrants are dropped off, generally several kilometres from the berm, they must cross it on foot before reaching the other side, where Algerian *passeurs*, operating with the Tahoua network, collect them before continuing the journey to Tamanrasset.

While human smuggling through Tahoua is thriving, flows through Arlit dropped in 2022. Arlit, which is about 200 kilometres north of Agadez, has historically been another significant transit hub for those seeking to reach Algeria; however, it ebbed in importance since 2019, a dynamic that accelerated in 2022. From a high in the early spring, when around 100 migrants per week departed Arlit for Algeria, numbers declined, with only a dozen or so migrants departing in mid-autumn. Instead, most flows through Arlit involved Nigeriens and foreign workers travelling to the Tchibarakatene goldfield, a movement that is tolerated by Nigerien authorities and that involved around 1 000 people travelling each week.

Movement of foreign migrants to Libya remains limited

In contrast to rising movement by foreign irregular migrants through Niger to Algeria, the number travelling via Niger to Libya in 2022 remained very low. Those who did move mostly used bypass routes that circumvented well-policed areas and main cities such as Agadez. According to *passeurs*, as few as 200 foreign migrants travelled from Niger to Libya per week in December 2022. Among these, only 40 to 50 travelled via Agadez, previously the key transit point for movement to Libya, with the rest travelling via a more remote eastern route.

The reduced flow of foreign migrants through Agadez is not new, as it is a direct result of the implementation of Niger's 2015 law criminalizing human smuggling and the enforcement that followed, ramping up sharply in mid-2016.³⁷ Combined with security checks and controls at Niger's borders and on in-land routes, growing security pressure has drastically reduced the flow of migrants to Agadez. To avoid arrest, smugglers became more clandestine, shifting departures to new locations – such as remote villages to the east of Agadez –, leaving at night and moving with smaller numbers of migrants. As a result, the costs to migrants have risen significantly, with non-Nigerien migrants being charged up to five times pre-2016 prices to accommodate for the risks of getting caught and increased fuel costs for longer and more remote routes.

Between early 2019 and late 2020, however, rising activity at a number of smuggling hubs in northern and southern Niger pointed to a partial relaxation of the law enforcement drive, probably in an effort to alleviate some of the economic and social grievances in the north.³⁸ This caused the smuggling of foreign migrants to increase slightly.

The COVID-19 pandemic upended this rebound, with travel restrictions introduced locally and regionally to stem the virus's spread. Impediments on movement into and through Niger shrunk the pool of foreign migrants able to access the country, transit it and seek out smuggling services in the north. However, the gradual lifting of COVID-19-related restrictions and the reopening of Niger's borders on 17 June 2021 did not really usher in a substantial rise in the number of non-Nigerien migrants.³⁹

What remains of the transport of foreign migrants takes place mostly via remote routes to the east of Agadez. Throughout 2022, smugglers operating on routes to Libya continued to adapt to law enforcement measures, bypassing policed areas and venturing into more remote and dangerous territories, including areas on either side of the main route between Agadez, Dirkou and Madama, and stretches of desert to the east of Agadez. This adaptation is not new and, since 2016, has further consolidated the decline of Agadez as a human smuggling hub.⁴⁰

The most popular routes through eastern Niger are those that directly connect the Nigeria-Niger border to southern Libya, such as the route via Kouri Kantana, located 125 kilometres east of Agadez. Despite its remote location, Kouri Kantana has become a key exchange point on a south-north smuggling route traversing Niger. This route reportedly developed around 2018, as smuggling networks sought alternatives to the established transit hubs targeted by law enforcement and developed operations to bypass major towns and checkpoints between the Nigerian and Libyan borders.

For most migrants on the route, the journey typically starts in Kano, northern Nigeria, around 140 kilometres from the Nigerian border. In Kano, migrants contact a *coxeur* (usually recommended to them by those who have previously made the journey) who organizes the journey to Sebha, Libya. The *coxeur* will first give migrants instructions on how to reach the Nigerien town of May Moudjia by taxi. From May Moudjia to Sebha, the journey is usually divided into two stages, each of which involves different *passeurs*. First, Nigerien *passeurs*, usually Hausa-speaking Tuareg or Germa from the southern Zinder region with knowledge of its routes, transport migrants the 460 kilometres to Kouri Kantana, typically using 4x4 Toyota Hilux vehicles. In Kouri Kantana, the migrants are handed over to a second *passeur*, usually from a network of Libyan-based Tebu, who will transport the migrants to Libya.

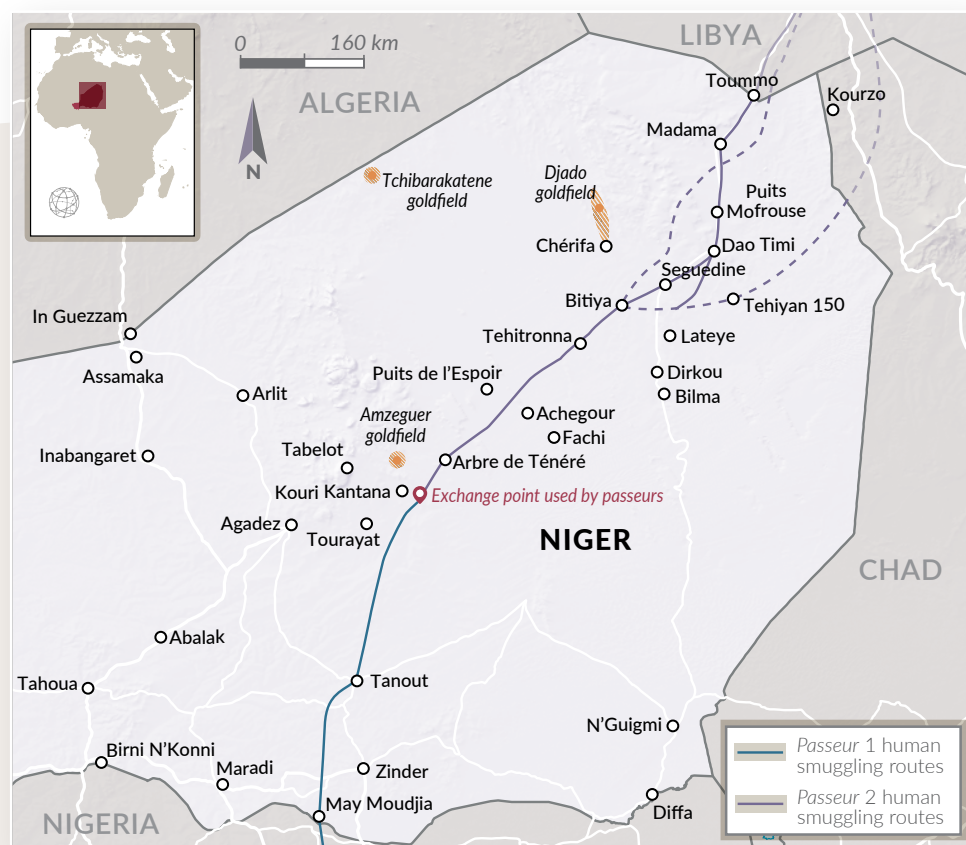


FIGURE 3 Clandestine route via Kouri Kantana used by smugglers between Nigeria and Libya.

Smuggling along this route involves mainly sub-Saharan migrants, in particular Nigerians. However, during the COVID-19-related border closure from March 2020 to June 2021, Pakistani migrants also used this route, as their travel through Niger became clandestine. The kidnapping of a group of Pakistani migrants travelling via Kouri Kantana in April 2021 highlighted the use of these routes by smuggling networks catering to Pakistani migrants.

Since the reopening of Niger's borders in June 2021, Pakistani migrants could resume legal travel within Niger, which led to a shift back to Agadez and away from Kouri Kantana. However, departures were reportedly suspended between February and July 2022 due to the absence of Pakistanis at the head of the network, who had both reportedly returned to Pakistan for several months. The suspension of departures during this time demonstrates the crucial importance of *coxeurs* in such operations, which are highly sophisticated and organized and, in the case of Pakistani migration through Niger, rely on the presence of relatively few individuals at the head of the network. Only one network currently transports Pakistani migrants through Niger.

On 27 July 2022, the first departure of Pakistani migrants since February took place from Agadez, according to information collected. According to a *passeur* involved in the network, 12 migrants were transported from Agadez to Sebha. The cost of the journey is FCFA200 000 (€305), which makes this activity relatively lucrative, as *passeurs* earn the same amount of money as with other foreign migrants, but for a legal – and therefore much safer and less risky – journey.

Smuggling operations that do continue via Kouri Kantana are those involving the illegal transport of foreign migrants. Although *passeurs* use these routes to avoid risks of arrest, they remain very dangerous for both the drivers and their passengers. These routes use dirt roads across isolated stretches of the desert, where breakdowns and accidents are not only frequent, but often fatal.

Although exact numbers are difficult to assess, transit through Niger has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of migrants in recent years. On 29 June 2022, for example, Nigerien military personnel found 10 bodies buried in a shallow grave around 30 kilometres from Dirkou (located 250 kilometres south of the Libyan border and 580 kilometres north-east of Agadez).⁴¹ The identities of the deceased remain unknown, but it is likely that the bodies belong to migrants who had been on their way to Libya.

Such incidents can be the direct result of *passeurs* having left their passengers in the desert. This may happen when *passeurs* fear interception by the Nigerien military on patrol and choose to abandon their passengers rather than risk arrest. However, it is unlikely that many *passeurs* would choose to forego their payment in this manner – as most migrants use the '*arrivé-payé*' system, where *passeurs* are only paid once their passengers arrive at their destination. This is especially the case since bribes are readily accepted by Nigerien military and law enforcement personnel in the area. According to several *passeurs* operating between Niger and Libya, the deaths of migrants in the desert are mostly the consequence of vehicle breakdowns and not abandonment by the driver. One *passeur* operating on routes to Libya said:

Generally, in the event of a vehicle breakdown, smugglers inform migrants to stay in the same position and that they will come back to pick them up as soon as possible; but after a few hours of absence, migrants who do not have experience of travelling in the desert, and if they are not assisted by an accompanying person of the smuggler, they disperse and leave the site of the breakdown towards nowhere. And this greatly increases the risk of death and makes others [...] [the authorities] [...] believe that it is an abandonment of the driver without providing any evidence.⁴²

The bypassing of restrictions has also led to numerous incidents of migrants left stranded in desert areas north of Agadez on routes to Libya. In some cases, stranded migrants are rescued by search-and-rescue operations led in the area by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières and Alarm Phone Sahara. On 6 July 2022, for instance, 44 migrants were rescued near Dirkou by the IOM and the Nigerien Agence Nationale de Protection Civile (National Agency for Civil Protection) after reportedly being abandoned by their driver following a breakdown.⁴³

Nigerien circular migration to Libya remains robust

Given the central role of human smuggling for the local economy in the Agadez region, the post-2016 contraction of smuggling activities resulted in the loss of livelihoods for many *passeurs* and their communities. To compensate for lost revenue, many turned to the transportation of Nigeriens to Libya. While Nigerien migration to Libya is not a new phenomenon, starting in 2017 smugglers helped to fuel a further rise in movement by offering transport at low prices.⁴⁴ As a result, the number of known Nigerien migrants in Libya doubled between July 2017 and December 2019, from 64 594 to 137 544.⁴⁵ While these numbers declined in 2020 and remained muted in 2021, probably due to COVID-19 restrictions on movement, by October 2022 they had rebounded, reaching 162 825, representing the largest migrant population group in the country.⁴⁶

In contrast to foreign migrants, most of whom traverse Niger aiming to ultimately reach Europe, Nigerien migrants travel to Libya as part of circular migration patterns. The migrants tend to stay in southern Libya, working in agriculture, construction or unskilled manual labour in order to supplement earning from agricultural work in Niger for several months per year.

In 2022, Nigerien circular migration continued to follow a regular, long-standing pattern based on the agricultural calendar. The planting season lasts from May to June and the harvest season from September to October, after which many Nigeriens seek short-term job opportunities in Libya, typically until the following planting season.⁴⁷ Demand for travel to Libya therefore fluctuates, with the number of migrants going to Libya rising between October and May, and the period from May to October typically seeing migrants return from Libya to Niger.

Although public transport is available to reach Agadez, journeys from Agadez to Niger's northern border and on to urban areas in southern Libya necessarily rely on individual smugglers, as few seasonal workers have their own means of transportation. The cyclical nature of Nigerien movement provides a relatively constant and predictable client base for smugglers.

Over the course of 2022, the average number of Nigerien migrants departing Agadez for Libya ranged between 500 and 1 200 per week. The lower figure corresponds to the planting and harvesting seasons when Nigeriens typically remain in Niger to engage in agricultural work at home, and the higher figure corresponds to the period after harvesting season in October when Nigeriens leave to find seasonal jobs in Libya until the following year. In July, for instance, the number of Nigeriens departing for Libya was reportedly as low as 400 to 500 per week, compared to 1 200 per week in December. One *passeur* noted in July: 'I have been in Agadez for two weeks; I have only found nine passengers. But if I find five or seven more, I will leave next week for Libya. Before the rainy season, I didn't spend as much time in Agadez, no more than a week, but now the passengers who leave are very few.'⁴⁸

Though technically still irregular, Nigerien authorities largely tolerate this activity, allowing vehicles transporting Nigeriens to join the weekly military-escorted trade convoy from Agadez to Dirkou. Within Nigerien territory, these movements are considered to be legal. However, the vast majority of Nigeriens continue the journey beyond Dirkou to Libyan cities such as Sebha without a requisite entry visa, and therefore enter Libya illegally. After crossing the border, Nigerien migrants travelling without documentation and visas are technically considered irregular by Libyan authorities. However, Nigerien migrants in Libya have traditionally not been targeted to the extent that foreign migrants from other countries are, given their long-standing presence in southern Libya, their essential role in local workforces and, at times, their connections with different communities in the country. Their transport is therefore considered a safer option for *passeurs*.

Nigerien migration to Libya was also the subject of a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Niger and Libya aimed at regulating these movements. On 30 November 2021, Niger's Minister of Employment and Social Protection, Dr Ibrahim Boukary, and Libya's Minister of Labour and Rehabilitation, Ali al-Abed Alreda, signed an MOU on labour mobility between the two countries.⁴⁹ The MOU reportedly details intentions to develop employment visas for Nigeriens working in Libya and to create legal pathways for migration. The establishment of a visa system could help institutionalize Nigerien's seasonal migration to Libya, and therefore contribute to formalizing long-established patterns of Nigerien migrants' seasonal journeys to Libya that for now remain informal despite being largely tolerated. However, it is unclear whether the MOU will result in concrete developments on the ground, as attempts to formalize what have long been informal exchanges and circular movements remain ambitious.



EXPULSIONS AND BUILD-UP OF MIGRANTS FUEL TENSIONS IN NORTHERN NIGER

Migration dynamics in northern Niger have also been impacted by a rise in the forced expulsions of foreigners from Algeria and Libya. In the case of Algeria, such expulsions are not new, having commenced in 2014, involving both Nigerien nationals (subject to a repatriation agreement between the two countries) and non-Nigeriens.⁵⁰ In the case of Libya, expulsions to Niger were new, though the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), the armed actor controlling southern Libya, has engaged in refoulement activities routinely in recent years on the border with Chad, Sudan and Egypt. The uptick in expulsions is significant, primarily because of the risks these incidents pose to migrants' safety. It also signals a growing trend of unofficial and opaque refoulement practices – including raids and arrests of irregular migrants – as part of migration strategies in the region, which often involve human rights violations.

Most migrants expelled into northern Niger arrive from Algeria, involving at least 120 000 people since 2018.⁵¹ Algeria's deportations policy has waxed and waned in recent years, with the country intensifying expulsions in 2018, as part of a broader policy that sought to discourage arrivals to the country amid reduced migrant access to Libya, before sharply reducing them during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were then resumed in September 2020. In July 2021, Algeria reopened its border with Niger, which had been closed since March 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. This development led to a heightening in the scale of expulsion operations, and by October 2021, expulsions appeared to have returned to pre-COVID levels and have remained steady since. This resumption also coincided with a renewal of Algeria's campaign against illegal migration and migrant smuggling, combined with a hardening of the government's stance towards independent civil society organizations, including those providing support to migrants or promoting human rights.

The total number of non-Nigerien migrants expelled from Algeria to Niger in 2022 exceeded the yearly totals for 2020 and 2021. At least 14 680 third-country nationals were expelled between January and December 2022, the highest yearly total since 2019, when 15 547 people were expelled. The number of Nigerien migrants expelled in 2022 is also the highest since the beginning of expulsion operations, with 19 705 Nigeriens deported.⁵²

Exact numbers are difficult to ascertain due to the unofficial nature of expulsion operations, and data collected by the IOM and local or international humanitarian organizations can differ. However, the comparison of yearly data since 2019 shows that expulsion operations have now fully rebounded since COVID-19-related declines and seem set to continue the upward trend.

The treatment of migrants who are forcibly deported differed according to nationality. Nigerien migrants are returned to Niger by official convoys organized as part of a 2014 agreement between Niger and Algeria on the repatriation of Nigerien nationals. They are transported to Agadez, from where they either return to their place of origin or attempt another journey to Algeria.

After their arrest in Algeria, which often involves raids by Algerian police in main cities such as Algiers and Oran, but also Tamanrasset, in the south, foreign migrants – mostly West and Central Africans who are living in Algeria irregularly – are transported to the Nigerien border by trucks and dropped off in a desert area known as 'Point Zéro'. From there, they must walk 15 kilometres to the nearest Nigerien town, Assamakha. Expelled migrants are heavily reliant on assistance once they arrive on foot in Assamakha. Several local and international humanitarian organizations operate there, such as Alarm Phone Sahara, who conduct search and rescue operations in the desert, and Médecins Sans Frontières, who provide healthcare in a health centre.

From Assamakha, expelled migrants are mostly housed temporarily by the IOM, then transferred to transit centres in Arlit and Agadez. The time spent in Assamakha and in these transit centres can vary, but it has reached unprecedented levels in recent months due to the increasingly strained assistance capacities resulting from the uptick in expulsions.

To access assistance in IOM transit centres, migrants must agree to voluntary return programmes, which conditions basic humanitarian assistance to compliance with migration control imperatives and therefore puts into question the voluntary nature of such programmes. As a result, almost all migrants expelled from Algeria sign up for voluntary return to their country of origin, as they have no alternative to access food, water and basic services in Assamakha, and have often been stripped of their money and possessions during the raids in Algeria and expulsion operations.

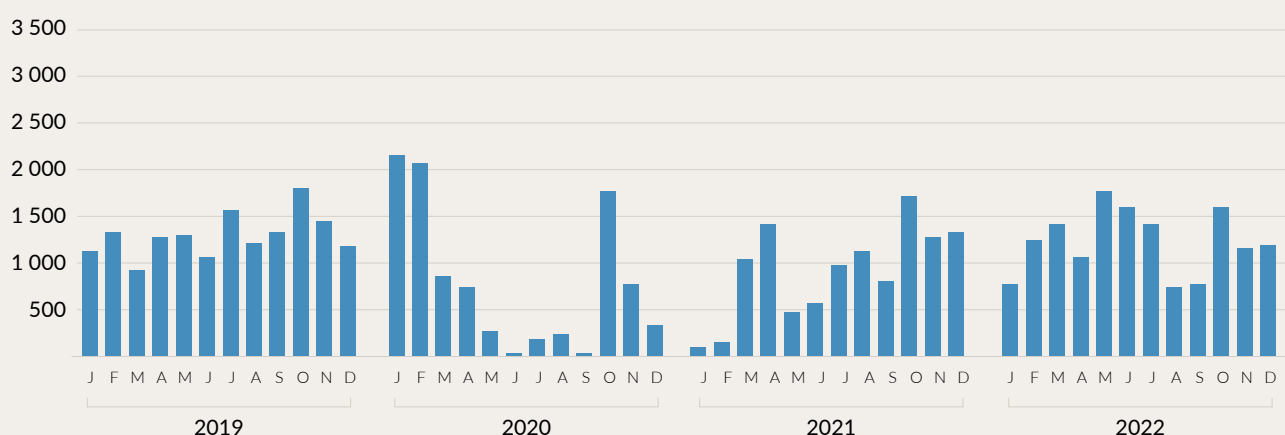


FIGURE 4 Number of foreign migrants expelled at the border from Algeria to Niger since 2019.

SOURCE: IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)



Nigerien migrants are expelled from Libya to Madama, Niger, by the Desert Patrol Company on 15 January 2022. *Photo: Desert Patrol Company Facebook page*

While deportations by Algeria have been longstanding, late 2021 and early 2022 saw a wave of expulsions from Libya. Late in 2021, Libyan security forces launched a crackdown on human smuggling activity between the Nigerien border and the Libyan town of Sebha. These operations were led by the LAAF affiliated Desert Patrol Company (DPC) based in Um al-Aranib, and included raids on migrant housing in Sebha, increased patrols in areas south of Sebha (such as Um al-Aranib and Qatrun) and expulsions of migrants to Niger.⁵³

The raids and arrests also raised fears among both migrants and smugglers due to reports that some operations led to violence and abuse. A Nigerien migrant in Agadez recounted his experience to the GI-TOC:

We were arrested on the Monday [10 January 2022]; we were going to work at 10 a.m. and when we got to the first checkpoint, they let us through. Then we came across a second checkpoint, and they told us to get out of the vehicle. They took all our money, our mobile phones, all our belongings, even our [cigarette] lighters. There were nine of us ... when we arrived at the airport [in Tamanhint] [...] they searched us again to take anything we had left [...]. There were about 200 people in one room and we did not have a toilet. If they speak to you and you answer, they beat you. If they speak to you and you don't understand, they think you are being clever, and they beat you hard. One person asked where the toilet was, and they told him to lie on the ground and they beat him. Three people tried to escape and the guards fired at them. Two got away, but the third one was hit. They beat him to the head with their guns; there was blood everywhere. We did not hear from him again.⁵⁴

A *porteur* who had returned to Agadez in early January 2022 stressed that:

The Libyan authorities have not left us alone these last two weeks; they are breaking houses and bringing you [the smuggler] among the [expelled migrants] or they take you hostage in the houses of ransom [where some migrants are detained pending payment of ransom for their release]. The Nigerien authorities must speak to the Libyan leaders. People with their wives and children, they break their house and send him for deportation or take him hostage to claim money he doesn't have.

Nigerien migrants arrested during these raids were reportedly detained several days in Tamanhint before being deported. From there, migrants were transported in trucks on an eight-hour drive to Madama, a Nigerien town roughly 100 kilometres south of the Libyan border. Some migrants reported that the journey in fact took two days, with an overnight stop in Toummo. In Madama, migrants were handed over to the Nigerien military and registered, before being taken back to Agadez, this time in trucks operated by the Nigerien authorities. This journey took approximately three days. On arrival

in Agadez, local contacts reported that a committee had been set up to deal with the expelled migrants, some of whom originate from other regions of Niger and may have no funds to return home after their failed migration attempt.

Although some later expulsions involved a number of foreign migrants, a majority of those targeted by these operations were Nigerien. Between mid-December and early March 2022, over 2 500 migrants were expelled from Libya. Since March, no new expulsions have been reported, and *passeurs* reportedly swiftly resumed activities as normal. However, arrests and extortion of migrants have continued in Sebha, which may presage heightened border management activities by armed groups, such as the DPC, associated with the Sebha Operations Room and the LAAF. The reasons behind the temporary expulsion operations remain unclear but appear more closely linked to political and security dynamics in southern Libya, rather than a specific focus by southern Libyan groups on migration management.

In fact, both Nigerien and Libyan security forces involved in these operations have reportedly offered migrants the possibility to return to Libya, in exchange for substantial bribes, according to information collected during the reporting period. This may have taken place at different stages of the expulsion. Some migrants reported they were given this option in Qatrun, Libya, by members of the Desert Patrol Company; others claimed that they were approached by *passeurs* at the Toummo crossing, while some reported that Nigerien military personnel offered to allow them back into Libya once they had arrived in Madama. The price for returning to Libya varied between LYD500 and LYD650 (€91.60–€119), depending on the departure point. This reportedly also included transport back to Qatrun or Sebha. Although interviewed migrants reported that some did choose to pay to return to Libya, very few Nigerien migrants travel with that amount of money, making it unlikely that many returned to Libya in this way.

Expulsions from Algeria and Libya have strained assistance capacities in northern Niger, due to the growing number of migrants in need of assistance, such as those expelled from Algeria, and limited administrative capacity to process voluntary returns and asylum applications. They have also contributed to rising tensions between migrants and local populations in Arlit and Agadez.

In Arlit, these tensions are primarily linked to the increasing number of migrants expelled from Algeria through unofficial convoys via Assamaka. In 2022, a combination of continued large-scale expulsions, the saturation of IOM transit centres in Niger and Mali's border closures has put pressure on an already fragile assistance framework for expelled migrants in Arlit. This situation has given rise to tensions among the migrant community, as already poor living conditions have become exacerbated by prolonged transit times and limited space.⁵⁵

Most foreign migrants who are returned to Niger through these expulsions remain in Arlit for several weeks while their files are processed by the IOM, before being transferred to Agadez, where they are offered voluntary return assistance either directly to their country of origin or via Niamey. A second IOM facility was built in April 2021 on the outskirts of Arlit to cope with the influx of expelled migrants. This serves as a pre-transit facility to house migrants while they wait to be admitted to the transit centre.

Despite this, IOM transit centres in Arlit, and further downstream in Agadez, are reportedly still struggling to cope with the number of arrivals and, in February 2022, this resulted in unprecedented delays for migrants waiting to be admitted. On 7 February, around 1 250 migrants – an unusually high number for one convoy – were deported at the Algerian border. After walking 15 kilometres to Assamaka, the migrants were accommodated in a local IOM reception centre. However, due to the lack of capacity in Arlit and Agadez transit centres, the migrants were held there for one month instead of the 14 days

required for COVID-19-related quarantine measures.⁵⁶ The IOM facility in Assamaka provides shelter, food and water for migrants, but was only designed to provide basic assistance for short stays. Living conditions are therefore reportedly rudimentary, resulting in grievances among migrants stranded there in February 2022.

In January 2022, the number of migrants gathering in Arlit also grew as a result of the closure of Mali's borders with countries belonging to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which temporarily disrupted the IOM's voluntary return programmes for Malian nationals.⁵⁷ When Mali closed its borders on 10 January, commercial flights between ECOWAS states and Mali were cancelled, leaving Malian migrants stranded in Niger. This resulted in Malian migrants being forced to wait in transit centres for extended periods of time, while other nationalities were allowed to continue to Niamey for voluntary return, leading to protests among the Malians, which resulted in skirmishes with local police and the arrest of 10 Malian nationals in February 2022.⁵⁸

In December, a local civil society actor in Arlit reported that IOM facilities remained overcrowded, detailing that 1 250 migrants were housed in the transit centre in Arlit, and 1 648 in the pre-transit centre on the outskirts of the city. According to this interviewee, a further 3 000 migrants were reportedly waiting at the IOM facility in Assamaka.⁵⁹

Facilities in Agadez are also facing increasing pressure, as they must accommodate migrants expelled from Algeria coming from Arlit, in addition to other migrants eligible for voluntary humanitarian returns in the Agadez region. This includes those found stranded in the far north-east on routes to Libya, who are provided with assistance in Dirkou.

Most migrants who require IOM's assistance in Dirkou fall into one of three broad categories. First, some migrants are transferred to the IOM by Nigerien security forces following their interception, and sometimes the arrest of their *passeur*, en route from Niger to Libya. Second, some migrants choose to return to Niger from Libya with the aim of either going back to their country or attempting a new journey to another destination, typically Algeria. Third, migrants can find themselves stranded in the vast stretches of desert north of Agadez following a vehicle breakdown or accident on the route to Libya. This third category is the most dangerous for migrants, as those who are not able to reach nearby villages on foot or are not found by search-and-rescue operations face almost certain death from exhaustion or dehydration.

Once in Agadez, migrants receive housing and assistance while they wait to be transported either directly to their country of origin using charter flights or to be transferred to the Niamey transit centre, where they are provided with commercial flights. However, the waiting time at transit centres in Agadez can be several months, as voluntary-return assistance capacity from Agadez and Niamey is strained due the high demand.

This is in spite of repatriation flights being organized relatively frequently. Although official figures were unavailable at the time of writing, interviewees in northern Niger with visibility over these movements reported that repatriation operations take place up to once a month.

However, tensions in Agadez are mostly linked to the situation of asylum seekers, which has been an ongoing challenge for both the UNHCR and local authorities in recent years. These tensions came to a head in 2022.

On 25 May, a Sudanese asylum seeker was killed during a protest near the UNHCR humanitarian centre outside of Agadez.⁶⁰ Sudanese asylum seekers have organized recurrent demonstrations since 2018 to demand better living conditions and a faster processing of their asylum applications, with some events resulting in skirmishes with security forces.⁶¹ However, this is the first time that a protester has been killed, exacerbating already fragile relations between the Sudanese refugee community and Nigerien authorities.

In interviews, asylum seekers underscored a number of frustrations with conditions within the humanitarian centre. Food, for example, is reportedly basic, often constituting rice, beans and pasta. Interviewees also noted that housing conditions, while improved from the initial days of the camp, remain basic and prone to extreme temperature fluctuations based on the season. Another source of frustration among interviewed asylum seekers seems to be the static situation facing those at the humanitarian centre. Some 15 kilometres outside of town, the facility's location impedes efforts by residents to access services in Agadez. Job options are similarly restricted by the remote location, alongside generally limited job opportunities in the area.

The broader issue, however, seems to be that there is no easy mechanism through which asylum seekers can permanently leave the facility. Many of the asylum seekers have spent years in Agadez. In interviews, two Sudanese asylum seekers indicated that they had arrived in 2017 and 2018, respectively, both coming from Libya after being victimized and trafficked in that country.

Protracted stays are linked to the absence of clear avenues for asylum seekers to exit the situation they find themselves in. Countries neighbouring Niger either face protracted internal conflict or have political situations that complicate the granting of asylum. Returning to their country of origin is also not a realistic option in the humanitarian centre, given the trauma most have faced and the ongoing violence at present.

The death of the Sudanese asylum seeker prompted demands by residents of the centre and local authorities to stress to Nigerien government and UNHCR delegations the need for a change in the status quo. Asylum seekers demanded their evacuation from the facility, and to be brought to a country where they are more protected and able to access an asylum system. 'Our demands are ... we declare that we are all victims running from persecution. We are refugees; we are human beings; we need dignity. The country we find ourselves in is not a safe zone. We are asking for international protection, [and] to be brought to a safe country with an effective asylum system,' one asylum seeker told the GI-TOC.⁶²



Damage caused by a fire that broke out during the skirmishes at the UNHCR centre in Agadez in May 2022. Photo: GI-TOC

On the other hand, local authorities have demanded that the humanitarian centre be closed, claiming that the presence of asylum seekers has led to an increase in crime, banditry and drug use. In a statement on 9 June, the head of the regional council noted, 'We must simply close the refugee transit centre. It must no longer serve as a framework for the development of thugs or to damage the image of our region through the depravity of our [morals] and customs and the initiation of our young people to drugs and violence.'⁶³

However, following this incident, no decision has reportedly been reached on either asylum seekers' demands for removal or demands by local authorities that the humanitarian centre be closed. Persisting frustrations among the asylum seeker community have reportedly led to an outflow of asylum seekers from UNHCR centres in Agadez and, to a lesser extent, Niamey in the latter half of 2022.

In 2022, there were reports that increasing numbers of asylum seekers were travelling to Libya as a result of perceived delays in their asylum applications. Some asylum seekers have reported several hundred departures in the latter half of 2022 – in particular, among the Sudanese community in Agadez. *Passeurs* in Agadez have also confirmed that some of their passengers are asylum seekers returning to Libya from Niger, and that they usually transport them alongside Nigerien migrants using legal routes.

Besides the departures from Agadez, departures of asylum seekers from Niamey are also reportedly on the rise. A Chadian asylum seeker who filed an application in Niger after having transited Libya explained in an interview in November that he had recently travelled back to Tripoli:

I travelled in April 2022, specifically in the month of Ramadan, due to delays in the processing time of my file at UNHCR in Niamey, after more than two years of waiting. Many other refugees and asylum seekers are in the same situation as me. Those who have the means of transport seek to go to Libya or Algeria to hope to reach Europe, and those who do not have the financial means are forced to stay in Niamey despite delays in processing their files.⁶⁴

The drivers of the current outflow are seemingly a mix of systemic frustrations and the outbreak of violence during protests in Agadez in May. It is still unclear whether departures of asylum seekers from Niger will persist in coming months, as some driving factors may only have a short-term impact on decisions to leave. However, other factors, such as limited resettlement capacity, waiting times for status determination and the living conditions of asylum seekers, are unlikely to improve in the medium-term.

In addition, the impact of worsening economic conditions in Niger could have an effect on the living conditions of asylum seekers in Niamey and Agadez, and on persisting grievances among local communities who see migrant and refugee populations as a threat. These factors could continue to push asylum seekers to leave Niger. Although numbers of departures appear low in comparison to other irregular migration flows, this phenomenon highlights the shortfalls of current international assistance frameworks aimed at protecting vulnerable migrant populations. This, in a regional context with rising insecurity, political instability and economic crisis, could further increase the number of people seeking refuge in Niger.



BUREAU D'ECOUTE D'ORIENTATION ARLIT

MIGRANT QUI A
?
LA POUR
ER ET
!
S AU
2 64 06 26
0 07 37 65
0 07 37 66
OUVERTURE
JEUDI
17H00
VENDI
14H00

ARE YOU A MIGRANT IN NEED
OF HELP?
WE'RE HERE TO INFORM
AND ASSIST YOU!
PLEASE COME IN OR CALL
(+227) 02 64 06 26
00 07 37 65
00 07 37 66
OPENING HOURS
MONDAY-THURSDAYS
9H00-17H00
FRIDAY
9H00-14H00



CONCLUSION

In 2022, human smuggling dynamics through Niger were characterized by the consolidation of trends that have developed over the last five years in a context marked first by the criminalization of human smuggling and subsequent collapse of Agadez's smuggling economy, and second by COVID-19 related disruptions. The reorganization of networks towards the transport of Nigerien seasonal migrants to Libya and the smuggling of foreign migrants to Algeria, as well as the reconversion of *passeurs* towards alternative activities linked to gold mining appear to have stabilized and are likely to continue in the long term.

As the factors underpinning the popularity of routes to Algeria are likely to remain, the coming year will also likely see sustained activity in smuggling hubs that cater to these movements, such as Tahoua. However, as the temporary crackdown in Tahoua has highlighted, these routes are not beyond the reach of Nigerien security forces. In a context in which expulsions of migrants from Algeria represent a growing challenge for Nigerien authorities, efforts to reduce smuggling activities to Algeria may increase. As incentives for local security personnel and limited resources are likely to remain a key challenge, the coming year could see renewed – but temporary – crackdowns on Tahoua, resulting in disruptions of movements to Algeria.

However, movements to both Libya and Algeria also depend on the continued arrival of foreign migrants to Niger. Rising insecurity across Niger's borders with Burkina Faso and Mali could affect the inflow of migrants from West Africa. While the use of public transport to Niger is likely to decrease due to the risk of attacks, as seen on routes from Ouagadougou to Niamey, it is unclear whether this will result in reduced movement or whether it will lead to the creation of alternative routes. While risks for migrants' safety on routes from Mali, Burkina Faso and, to a lesser extent, Benin are increasing, insecurity is likely to also continue to drive movements of refugees and IDPs in Niger's southern and eastern regions. In addition to those fleeing conflict and insecurity, movements of West African migrants seeking economic opportunities in Niger – in particular, in informal economies such as gold mining – are set to continue. These movements are mostly regional and are unlikely to involve smuggling services to Europe via Libya or Algeria.

Insecurity will also continue to affect smuggling activities in the north, with armed banditry remaining a serious challenge for already strained security forces and resources. In addition to persisting threats from Chadian armed groups whose prospects and appetite for reintegration in Chad are slim, the uptick in attacks by local groups is likely to be sustained in 2023 due to the highly lucrative potential of such activities in a context of limited licit livelihoods. By December 2022, increasing attacks by armed bandits also triggered renewed armed mobilization among local groups from the cross-border area between Niger, Chad and Libya. Several deadly clashes were reported in December and January, involving multiple groups composed of *passeurs*, traders, traffickers and other profiles whose activities have been impacted by banditry. Though similar mobilizations have existed in the past, the latter half of 2022 saw a significant – and worrying – uptick in armed violence. In the absence of effective responses to the rise of armed banditry by local security forces, communal initiatives have become a favoured approach to protect both licit and illicit livelihoods including illegal trade and human smuggling. Although these initiatives appear to be effective in the short term, temporarily curbing bandit activity, and are welcomed for the most part by local communities, the mobilization of communal armed groups risks driving a broader increase in armed violence.

As expulsions from Algeria have now reached pre-COVID levels and are likely to be sustained in the coming year, the strain on assistance capacities and delays in processing assisted voluntary returns in Arlit and Agadez may worsen in the medium term. This, combined with ongoing tensions surrounding the situation of asylum seekers in Agadez, could exacerbate grievances among the migrant and local communities. Close attention should be paid to how these tensions are addressed and how they affect the situation of vulnerable population groups among migrants.



NOTES

- 1 Jérôme Tubiana, Clotilde Warin and Gaffar Muhammad Saeneen, Multilateral Damage: The impact of EU migration policies on central Saharan routes, Clingendael, September 2018, <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/multilateral-damage/>.
- 2 Mark Micallef, Rupert Horsley and Alexandre Bish, The human conveyor belt broken: Assessing the collapse of the human-smuggling industry in Libya and the central Sahel, GI-TOC, April 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-human-conveyor-belt-broken-2/>.
- 3 Alice Fereday, Niger: Routes shift amid post-COVID increase in human smuggling, GI-TOC, June 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Human-smuggling-and-trafficking-ecosystems-NIGER.pdf>.
- 4 United Nations Development Programme, Specific Country Data, Niger, 2022, <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/NER>.
- 5 World Bank, Niger overview, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger/overview>.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 The New Arab, Algerian president bans food exports amid worries of shortages due to Ukraine war, 14 March 2022, <https://www.newarab.com/news/ukraine-algeria-bans-food-exports-amid-worries-shortages>.
- 8 International Federation of Red Cross And Red Crescent Societies, Niger: Food Insecurity Crisis - Emergency Appeal No. MDRNE026, 16 July 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/niger-food-insecurity-crisis-emergency-appeal-nmdrne026-operational-strategy>.
- 9 Christophe Châtelot, In Paris, Niger convinces investors to finance its economic and social development plan, *Le Monde*, 8 December 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2022/12/08/in-paris-niger-convinces-investors-to-finance-its-economic-and-social-development-plan_6006945_124.html.
- 10 Mathieu Pellerin, Beyond the 'Wild West': The gold rush in northern Niger, Small Arms Survey, SANA briefing paper, June 2017, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/beyond-wild-west-gold-rush-northern-niger>.
- 11 Alice Fereday, Niger: Routes shift amid post-COVID increase in human smuggling, GI-TOC, June 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Human-smuggling-and-trafficking-ecosystems-NIGER.pdf>.
- 12 Mark Micallef et al, Conflict, coping and COVID: Changing human smuggling and trafficking dynamics in North Africa and the Sahel in 2019 and 2020, GI-TOC, April 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/smuggling-trafficking-sahel-2020/>; Alice Fereday, Niger: Routes shift amid post-COVID increase in human smuggling, GI-TOC, June 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Human-smuggling-and-trafficking-ecosystems-NIGER.pdf>.
- 13 Interview with a Nigerien *passeur*, Agadez, June 2022.
- 14 Abdoukader Afane and Laurent Gagnol, *Une ruée vers l'or contemporaine au Sahara: l'extractivisme aurifère informel au nord du Niger*, *Vertigo*, Volume 20, issue 3, December 2020, <http://journals.openedition.org/vertigo/29044> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/vertigo.29044>.
- 15 Alice Fereday, Labour-trafficking in ASGM: Assessing risks in the Sahara-Sahel goldfields, OCWAR-T research report 3, June 2023, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/labour-trafficking-risks-sahara-sahel-asgm/>.
- 16 Mondafrique, *L'attaque d'un groupe rebelle dans le nord du Niger*, 18 June 2022, <https://mondafrique.com/lattaque-dun-groupe-politico-militaire-dans-le-nord-du-niger/>.
- 17 Alice Fereday, Niger: Routes shift amid post-COVID increase in human smuggling, GI-TOC, June 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Human-smuggling-and-trafficking-ecosystems-NIGER.pdf>.
- 18 Laurent Gagnol, Rhoumour Ahmet Tchilouta and Abdoukader Afane, *Enjeux territoriaux et éthiques de la régulation de la ruée vers l'or au nord du Niger*, *Revue internationale des études du développement*, 249, 2022, 02 September 2022, <http://journals.openedition.org/ried/1123>.

- 19 See UNHCR Niger, Map Population of Concern – January 2023, 9 February 2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/98687>.
- 20 Mahamadou Abdoulkarim, *L'insécurité sur l'axe Niamey-Ouagadougou inquiète*, Deutsche Welle, 17 March 2022, <https://www.dw.com/fr/lins%C3%A9curit%C3%A9-sur-laxe-niamey-ouagadougou-inqui%C3%A8te/a-61165982>.
- 21 RFI, *Niger: au moins 19 morts dans l'attaque d'un bus qui revenait de Ouagadougou*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20220317-niger-au-moins-19-morts-dans-l-attaque-d-un-bus-qui-revenait-de-ouagadougou>.
- 22 A. Barma, *Insécurité: un mort et plusieurs blessés dans l'attaque d'un bus de transport à la frontière burkinabé*, Actu Niger, 19 May 2022, <https://www.actuniger.com/societe/18176-insecurite-un-mort-et-plusieurs-blesses-dans-l-attaque-d-un-bus-de-transport-a-la-frontiere-burkinabe.html>.
- 23 Interview with a Burkinabé migrant, Agadez, May 2022.
- 24 Alice Fereday, *Niger: Routes shift amid post-COVID increase in human smuggling*, GI-TOC, June 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Human-smuggling-and-trafficking-ecosystems-NIGER.pdf>.
- 25 Alexandre Bish, *Soldiers of fortune: The future of Chadian fighters after the Libyan ceasefire*, GI-TOC, December 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/chadian-fighters-libyan-ceasefire/>.
- 26 GI-TOC, *Banditry in northern Niger: Geographic diffusion and multiplication of perpetrators*, Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, Risk Bulletin n°4, June 2022, <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/wea-obs-004/02-banditry-in-northern-niger.html>.
- 27 Aïr-Info Agadez, *Infoflash : fin de parcours pour un des bandits armés écumant l'axe Dirkou-Agadez*, Aïr-Info Agadez Facebook Page, 16 April 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/PAirInfoAgadez/photos/a.1065483263536968/5025455364206385>.
- 28 Aïr Info, *Axe Agadez-Bilma : une attaque de bandits armés fait deux morts et quatre blessés parmi les militaires nigériens*, 9 April 2022, <https://airinfoagadez.com/2022/04/09/axe-agadez-bilma-une-attaque-de-bandits-armes-fait-deux-morts-et-quatre-blesses-parmi-les-militaires-nigeriens/>.
- 29 Interview with an actor with visibility over smuggling operations between Niger and Libya, September 2022.
- 30 Aïr-Info Agadez, *Agadez : 122 kg d'or portés disparus après l'attaque survenue sur l'axe Djado-Agadez*, Facebook, 31 January 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/PAirInfoAgadez/posts/4804412652977325/>.
- 31 Tadress24info, *[#NIGER]: l'affaire 122 kg les présumés coupables et transférés à la prison d'Agadez*, Facebook, 21 March 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/tadress.info/photos/a.612908268917299/1874557286085718/?type=3>.
- 32 Aïr-Info Agadez, *Agadez/Tchibarakaten : des individus lourdement armés attaquent un convoi d'orpailleurs*, 23 August 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/PAirInfoAgadez/photos/a.1065483263536968/5381889348562983/?type=3>.
- 33 A. Karim, *Attaque d'un bus SONITRAV aux encablures d'Agadez : de l'or et plusieurs biens emportés*, Actu Niger, 29 September 2022, <https://www.actuniger.com/societe/18615-attaque-d-un-bus-sonitrav-aux-encablures-d-agadez-de-l-or-et-plusieurs-biens-emportes.html>.
- 34 Ibrahim Manzo Diallo, *Agadez : 12 kilos d'or emportés après un braquage ce matin au centre ville*, Aïr Info, 8 October 2022, <https://airinfoagadez.com/2022/10/08/agadez-12-kilos-dor-emportes-apres-un-braquage-ce-matin-au-centre-ville/>.
- 35 Interview with a Nigerian migrant, Agadez, September 2022.
- 36 Interview with a *porteur* in Tahoua, October 2022.
- 37 Mark Micallef, Rupert Horsley and Alexandre Bish, *The human conveyor belt broken: Assessing the collapse of the human-smuggling industry in Libya and the central Sahel*, GI-TOC, April 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-human-conveyor-belt-broken-2/>.
- 38 Mark Micallef et al, *Conflict, coping and COVID: Changing human smuggling and trafficking dynamics in North Africa and the Sahel in 2019 and 2020*, GI-TOC, April 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/smuggling-trafficking-sahel-2020/>.
- 39 Alice Fereday, *Niger: Routes shift amid post-COVID increase in human smuggling*, GI-TOC, June 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Human-smuggling-and-trafficking-ecosystems-NIGER.pdf>.
- 40 Mark Micallef, Rupert Horsley and Alexandre Bish, *The human conveyor belt broken: Assessing the collapse of the human-smuggling industry in Libya and the central Sahel*, GI-TOC, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-human-conveyor-belt-broken-2/>.
- 41 Nadia Chahed, *Niger : dix corps de migrants présumés découverts dans le désert*, Anadolu Agency, 29 June 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/niger-dix-corps-de-migrants-pr%C3%A9sum%C3%A9s-d%C3%A9couverts-dans-le-d%C3%A9sert-/2626270>.
- 42 Interview with a *porteur* operating on routes to Libya, Agadez, September 2022.
- 43 La Presse, *44 migrants secourus dans le désert, selon l'ONU*, 14 July 2022, <https://www.lapresse.ca/international/afrique/2022-07-14/niger/44-migrants-secourus-dans-le-desert-selon-l-onu.php>.
- 44 Mark Micallef et al, *Conflict, coping and COVID: Changing human smuggling and trafficking dynamics in North Africa and the Sahel in 2019 and 2020*, GI-TOC, April 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/smuggling-trafficking-sahel-2020/>.

- 45 IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Libya's Migrant Report, Mobility Tracking Round 11 (June–July 2017), 29 August 2017, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/libya-%E2%80%94migrant-report-11-june-%E2%80%94july-2017>; IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Libya's Migrant Report, Mobility Tracking Round 28 (October–December 2019), 12 February 2020, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/libya-%E2%80%94migrant-report-28-oct-dec-2019>.
- 46 IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Libya's Migrant Report, Mobility Tracking Round 43 (July–August 2022), 31 October 2022, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/libya-migrant-report-43-july-august-2022>.
- 47 IOM, Mobility in the Chad–Libya–Niger triangle, August 2019–September 2020, 2021, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/libya-%E2%80%94mobility-chad-libya-niger-triangle-august-2019-september-2020>.
- 48 Interview with a *passer* in Agadez, July 2022
- 49 IOM, Libya and Niger move forward on strengthening migration management and labour mobility, 30 November 2021, <https://www.iom.int/news/libya-and-niger-move-forward-strengthening-migration-management-and-labour-mobility>.
- 50 Raouf Farrah, Algeria's migration dilemma: Migration and human smuggling in southern Algeria, GI-TOC, December 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/algerias-migration-dilemma/>.
- 51 Based on IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix data.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Desert Patrol Company – *سرية الجوريات الصحراوية*, "The Desert Patrol Company carried out a massive deportation of hundreds of illegal immigrants", Facebook, 16 November 2021, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbidQ2k2fENAF9D24yaRsESTfQ2Xj4crjoWB5HGogEvRuQRCC4w4QL4mv41qSgevtMw4ugl&id=107500451693536
- 54 Interview with a Nigerien migrant in Agadez, January 2022.
- 55 Mehdi Chebil, «*Cela fait trois mois que je suis bloqué ici*» : au nord du Niger, la longue attente des refoulés d'Algérie pour rentrer chez eux, Info Migrants, 17 November 2022, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/44760/cela-fait-trois-mois-que-je-suis-bloque-ici--au-nord-du-niger-la-longue-attente-des-refoules-dalgerie-pour-rentre-chez-eux>.
- 56 Quarantine measures imposed on expelled migrants had also caused tensions in 2020, see Fatma Ben Hamad, *Niger : à Arlit, des migrants subsahariens se révoltent contre une quarantaine sans fin*, RFI, 24 April 2022, <https://observers.france24.com/fr/20200424-niger-arlit-migrants-subsahariens-revoltent-protester-contre-une-quarantaine-fin>.
- 57 *Le Monde*, *Au Mali, flou autour des vols militaires français et onusiens après la fermeture des frontières*, 13 January 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/01/13/au-mali-flou-autour-des-vols-militaires-francais-et-onusiens-apres-la-fermeture-des-frontieres_6109281_3212.html.
- 58 Mali Actu, *C'est arrivé le vendredi dernier à Arlit (Niger): Dix migrants maliens arrêtés par les forces de l'ordre nigériennes suite à un incident sur le site d'accueil de l'OIM*, 16 February 2022, <https://maliactu.net/cest-arrive-le-vendredi-dernier-a-arlit-niger-dix-migrants-maliens-arretes-par-les-forces-de-lordre-nigeriennes-suite-a-un-incident-sur-le-site-daccueil-de-loim/>.
- 59 Interview with a civil society actor in Arlit, December 2022.
- 60 VOA, *Mort d'un Soudanais lors d'une manifestation de demandeurs d'asile au Niger*, 27 May 2022, <https://www.voafrique.com/a/mort-d-un-soudanais-lors-d-une-manifestation-de-demandeurs-d-asile-au-niger/6590795.html>.
- 61 BBC, *335 demandeurs d'asile soudanais arrêtés au Niger*, 7 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-51015327>.
- 62 Interview with a Sudanese asylum seeker, June 2022.
- 63 Conseil Régional d'Agadez, «*Il faut purement et simplement fermer le centre d'accueil des réfugiés d'Agadez*», dicit Mohamed ANACKO, *Président du Conseil régional d'Agadez*, 9 June 2022, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/ConseilRegionaldAgadezCRAZ/posts/pfbidODXrjPDizF58mGDEwTbQnShgtJpYo3Lbcjhx1jc6eNZ2KJcjkVu6KVW6tLFHKaeawl>.
- 64 Interview with a Chadian asylum seeker in Tripoli, Libya, November 2022.



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 600 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net