

HUMAN SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING ECOSYSTEMS  
– NORTH AFRICA AND THE SAHEL

2023 SERIES



**GLOBAL  
INITIATIVE**  
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL  
ORGANIZED CRIME

# CHAD

FEAR OF REBELLION CONTINUES TO  
AFFECT HUMAN SMUGGLING ACTIVITY

Alice Fereday | Alexandre Bish

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## INTRODUCTION

**H**uman smuggling in Chad mostly involves northbound movements linking southern and eastern areas of the country to the north, in particular the gold mining areas in the Tibesti mountains, and to Libya. As a result, these dynamics are often connected to and impacted by the situation in northern Chad, where decades of political unrest, successive rebellions, intercommunity conflict, and deeply entrenched illicit economies and transnational organized crime dynamics are key factors of instability. Chadian authorities have long responded to these risks through securitization, including, in recent years, tight control over key routes and hubs, and a ban on travel to the north, further increasing demand for smuggling services among Chadians travelling to the goldfields or further afield to Libya, and in some cases, Europe.

In 2022, human smuggling activity in Chad continued to be heavily affected by the political and security developments that followed the incursion led by the Front pour l'Alternance et la Concorde au Tchad (Front for change and concord in Chad – FACT) and ensuing death of President Idriss Déby, the country's long-time leader, in April 2021.<sup>1</sup>

This upheaval interrupted what had been a broader rise of human smuggling from and through Chad, which, despite being illegal, had increased since 2016.<sup>2</sup> This rise was in part due to the displacement of smuggling routes from Niger and Sudan, following anti-smuggling interventions in those two countries, which led to the use of Chad as a transit hub for human smuggling networks. Despite the displacement of routes, the number of migrants transiting the country still paled in comparison to the numbers that continued transiting Sudan and Niger.

The most significant human smuggling itinerary in Chad remains the transport of migrants, both Chadian and foreign, to the gold mining economy along the country's northern border with Libya. Since their discovery in 2012 and 2013, goldfields in the north have developed into major economic hubs attracting mostly poor migrants from across the region.<sup>3</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic and linked travel restrictions in 2020 had little impact on movement to the goldfields. Rather, following the October 2020 ceasefire in Libya, the arrival of former mercenaries previously engaged in Libya to Kouri Bougoudi resulted in an uptick in gold mining, which in turn fuelled demand for workers. This development caused a surge in the movement of Sudanese and Chadian miners towards the goldfield since mid-2020.<sup>4</sup>





Kouri Bougoudi's main market and smuggling hub, Kouri 35, prior to the evacuation of the goldfield in May 2022. *Photo: GI-TOC*

In 2021, both human smuggling activity routing through Chad as well as flows linked to gold mining were disrupted by military crackdowns triggered by the FACT incursion. The incursion sparked an increase in military presence and pressure on routes to the north and the Kanem region, where many FACT fighters originate, and which is a key corridor for migrant smuggling routes. Military operations considerably reduced smuggling activities across the country, especially through major cities and transport hubs. Following the initial disruption in April 2021 and throughout 2022, enduring fears of rebel incursion encouraged the Chadian government to maintain pressure on northbound movements. Amid sustained government crackdowns in the north, some human smuggling was rerouted to eastern Niger, with the ultimate destination being northern Chad or Libya.

The continued crackdown on human smuggling through Chad in 2022 was also set against a backdrop of mounting political tensions amid the stalling of the dialogue process initiated by Chad's transitional authorities, which was meant to pave the way for elections. Although initially meant to be temporary, Mahamat Déby's assumption of leadership after his father's death was extended for another two years on 8 October.<sup>5</sup> The decision was made after the conclusion of a 'pre-dialogue' and a 'national dialogue' between the government and members of the political and armed opposition – widely seen by the political opposition as a pretence of an inclusive transition to gain the support of some long-term opponents while appeasing international stakeholders.

News of Déby's term extension in October, and the possibility that he could then run for election, sparked protests across the country. Security forces killed at least 50 protestors in several towns and cities, including N'Djamena. They also arrested 621 people, 262 of whom were charged and handed prison terms of between two and three years.<sup>6</sup>

Conflict also erupted in Chad's largest goldfield in 2022. In May, violent intercommunal clashes broke out at the Kouri Bougoudi goldfield, which led to a government clampdown and the eventual closure of the field. The goldfield is a major node for human smuggling between Chad and Libya, which meant that the government closure displaced miners and considerably affected human smuggling activities in the north. The reopening of the goldfield in September, under the auspices of the Chadian Ministry of Mines and Geology, stimulated northbound migration in the last quarter of the year and represents a significant development for local and regional dynamics should it effectively pave the way for the regularization of gold mining in the Tibesti.

## **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, NGO personnel, security actors, international observers 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 Chad and the broader region.





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## DYNAMICS SHAPING THE MIGRATION CONTEXT IN CHAD

Chad, the second-least developed country in the world, has endured multiple humanitarian crises since its independence.<sup>7</sup> Over the past decade, the combination of falling oil prices, poor agropastoral production, and a deteriorating security situation along the country's borders have severely affected the country's economy and local populations. In 2022, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs declared that 6.1 million people – or one in three Chadians – required urgent humanitarian assistance.<sup>8</sup> More than 2 million suffered from severe food insecurity and a million were in situations of forced displacement.<sup>9</sup>

In Chad's Lac region, the humanitarian situation is further exacerbated by the impact of violent extremism and conflict in the Lake Chad basin, in particular in neighbouring Cameroon. There, Boko Haram violence and intercommunity conflicts regularly push thousands to seek refuge in Chad.<sup>10</sup>

These challenges were compounded in 2022 by climate-related floodings, which impacted at least 1.3 million people, forcing President Déby to declare a state of emergency to better address the issue, which affected the capital, N'Djamena.<sup>11</sup> The disruption of rainfall cycles also results in droughts, which further impedes food production. It is likely that this, in turn, has influenced increases in intercommunity violence, with most violence linked to herder–farmer conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Over the past two years, three new crises have further heightened Chad's already dire economic and humanitarian situation: the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic ramifications of the war in Ukraine on global inflation and a political crisis that began with President Idriss Déby's death in 2021.<sup>13</sup> These crises are likely to contribute to the drivers pushing people to leave Chad to seek better livelihoods elsewhere, which, in turn, is likely to increase the demand for smuggling services.<sup>14</sup>

Movement restrictions introduced by the Chadian government to contain the COVID-19 pandemic had little impact on human smuggling activity across the country in 2020.<sup>15</sup> Such smuggling remained closely tied to the goldfields in the northern Tibesti region.

The war in Ukraine, which intensified in February 2022, has led to an increase in oil, gas, and food prices (especially wheat derivatives) in Chad and the wider Sahel region.<sup>16</sup> On 1 June 2022, Mahamat Déby declared a food emergency due to the lack of grain supplies, calling for international humanitarian support.<sup>17</sup> The cost of locally produced food also increased as a result. The price of sorghum, for



Residents of N'Djamena flee their flooded houses with their belongings, following the first major rains of the season, August 2022. © Aurelie Bazzara-Kibangula/AFP via Getty Images

instance, one of the country's most important subsistence crops, rose by 40% between 2021 and 2022.<sup>18</sup> Prices for these products seem set to increase over the next two years.

Parallel to the Ukraine war, Chad's political and security dynamics have undergone a major upheaval since the FACT rebel group incursion in April 2021 and the subsequent death of President Idriss Déby, who had been Chad's leader for 30 years.<sup>19</sup> General Mahamat Déby, son of the deceased president, became head of Chad's transitional military council (Conseil militaire de transition, CMT), placing him in de facto control of the country. This was in defiance of the constitutional requirement that the President of the National Assembly should preside over the transition.

In the first months of 2022, the CMT advanced initiatives for an inclusive political transition. These were widely perceived by the political opposition to be a pretence, aimed at gaining the support of some long-term opponents while appeasing international stakeholders with the ultimate objective of extending Déby's time in power.

The first initiative involved a 'pre-dialogue' process, with apparent representatives of 52 rebel groups, which took place between 13 March and 8 August 2022 in Doha, Qatar.<sup>20</sup> According to rebels and other interviewees in Chad, only four of the 52 represented groups actually held an armed presence in southern Libya or northern Chad: FACT; the Conseil de commandement militaire pour le salut de la république (Military command council for the salvation of the republic – CCMRSR); the Front de la nation pour la démocratie et la justice au Tchad (Front of the nation for democracy and justice in Chad), and the Rassemblement pour la démocratie et le changement (Rally for Democracy and Change).



The pre-dialogue's official objective of achieving peace with rebels and gaining their participation in the subsequent national dialogue failed. FACT and the CCMSR, who represent the largest security threat to N'Djamena, and 16 other groups, quickly withdrew from the negotiations and formed the Cadre permanent de concertation et de réflexion (Permanent framework for consultation and reflection).<sup>21</sup> One of their main grievances was the government's unwillingness to guarantee that members of the CMT would leave power after the national dialogue. The Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement (Union of forces for democracy and development), the Union des forces de la résistance (Union of resistance forces) and 31 other groups eventually signed a peace accord in August, which also entailed the release of prisoners by the government.<sup>22</sup>

The pre-dialogue process was followed by an 'Inclusive and sovereign national dialogue' (Dialogue national inclusif et souverain, DNIS), involving presidential consultations with over 1 400 delegates from signatory rebel groups, opposition parties and civil society groups in N'Djamena.<sup>23</sup> According to interviewees in N'Djamena, the high number of political parties and rebel groups invited to participate was a strategy employed by the government to dilute the opinion and votes of the actual political opposition, while displaying a semblance of democracy. Some interviewees believe around 50 new Chadian political parties were created between January and July 2022. The national inclusive dialogue was initially scheduled for February and eventually held in N'Djamena between 20 August and 8 October.



The 'Inclusive and sovereign national dialogue', held from August to October 2022 in N'Djamena, involved presidential consultations with rebel groups, opposition parties and civil society groups. © Denis Sassou Gueipeur/AFP via Getty Images



The fact that the Presidium (the executive committee) of the DNIS was selected by the presidency, ultimately allowing them to control the agenda and content of the dialogue, led to the withdrawal of 105 political parties and 75 civil society organizations on 28 August.<sup>24</sup> In September, the headquarters of the leading opposition party, the Transformateurs, were raided, eventually causing the party leader, Succès Masra, to flee to Cameroon.<sup>25</sup>

On 8 October, the DNIS concluded with the adoption of a resolution extending the transition for another two years, dissolving the CMT but maintaining General Mahamat Déby as transitional president. Controversially, it also stated that members of the junta – including Déby, who had previously pledged to stand down – could contest in future elections.<sup>26</sup> Protests broke out following the news but were violently repressed. On 20 October, Chadian security forces killed at least 50 protesters and made 621 arrests, reportedly transferring prisoners to 'Koro Toro', an infamous high-security prison in the desert, 575 kilometres north-east of N'Djamena.<sup>27</sup> Of these, 262 protesters were later handed prison terms of between two and three years.<sup>28</sup> The repression also targeted Chadian journalists in the capital and major cities, reportedly pushing several journalists to flee the country.

The two-year extension of the transition process, as well as the worsening of socio-economic factors as a result of the war in Ukraine, are likely to further boost the drivers of emigration, especially for Chad's burgeoning youth who are left with few economic opportunities. However, with the likelihood of sustained government anti-rebel crackdowns in the north (given that rebels remain a threat to the current government), it is unclear whether  *passeurs*, the colloquial name in the Sahel for transporters involved in human smuggling, operating on these axes will be able to respond to rising demand for emigration.

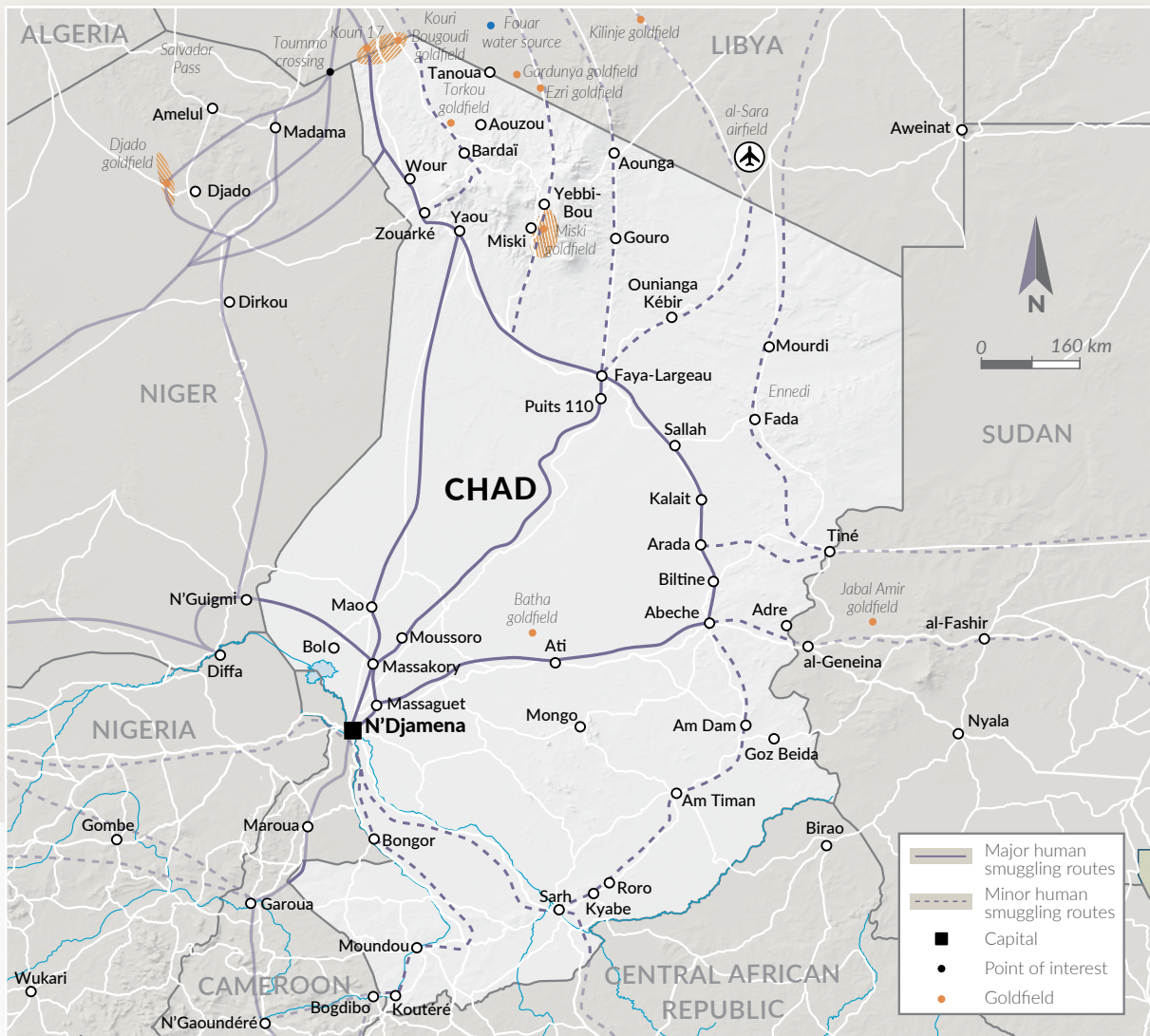


## MILITARY MAINTAINS CRACKDOWNS IN THE NORTH, RESTRICTING LIBYA-BOUND FLOWS

**T**wo major government crackdowns affected human smuggling flows in Chad over the last year. The first crackdown was motivated by the government's continued efforts to disrupt rebel activities both in northern Chad and the Kanem region. These efforts began in April 2021, when rebels belonging to FACT, which had been based in southern Libya, launched an offensive into Chadian territory. This was the most serious attack faced by the Chadian government since 2008, when a rebel coalition stormed the capital. Despite the withdrawal of FACT forces to Libya, persistent government fears around further incursions prompted a continued securitization of the northern region throughout 2022 to prevent Chadians from joining FACT ranks in Libya.<sup>29</sup>

According to *passeurs* interviewed in 2021 and 2022, this securitization successfully reduced human smuggling activities across northern Chad, as well as from major urban areas, which function as significant hubs for transport across the country.<sup>30</sup>

Among these transport hubs, Abeche in eastern Chad stands out as one of the most prominent transit points for people travelling to the northern Chadian goldfields and Libya. Abeche is used not only by migrants arriving from southern Chad and N'Djamena, but also by people arriving from Sudan, because of its proximity to the Sudanese border. *Passeurs* interviewed in Abeche said that the prices for travel had risen in 2022 as a result of reduced departures. In November, the journey from Abeche to Kouri Bougoudi cost between FCFA130 000 and FCFA150 000 (€197–€228), almost double prices in early 2021, when it cost between FCFA75 000 and FCFA100 000 (€114–€152).



**FIGURE 1** Human smuggling routes through Chad, 2022.

The second major crackdown on human smuggling was initiated after intercommunal violence broke out at the Kouri Bougoudi goldfield in May 2022. At least 200 people died in violence that emerged in Kouri 35, a key marketplace and hub for licit and illicit activity in the heart of the goldfield.<sup>31</sup> The violence was reportedly triggered by a disagreement between two gold miners, one of Arab origin and the other Tama (an ethnic group primarily from eastern Chad and western Sudan). This dispute then ignited retaliatory attacks, reviving deep-rooted intercommunal tensions. Such violence has precedent in broader dynamics in the region.<sup>32</sup> Intercommunal violence between Arab and non-Arab communities has primarily affected eastern Chad, where conflicts opposing Arab herders and local non-Arab farming communities have seen significant exacerbation in the past three years.<sup>33</sup>

Twelve days after the clashes began, the Chadian military closed the gold site and evacuated miners in large trucks driven by local drivers. Between 7 200 and 8 640 people were evacuated, according to a Chadian official. Other gold miners were forced to travel independently to nearby villages and towns, such as Zouar, Zouarké, Faya and Wour, but also further afield to Mao and Moussoro.





Shelters belonging to gold miners are set on fire amid communal violence that broke out in Kouri Bougoudi in May 2022. *Photo: GI-TOC*

This mass outflow of evacuees who could not afford to continue their journey to their place of origin placed a great strain on regional towns and villages throughout June. By mid-month, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) had recorded 3 299 gold miners stranded in villages and towns, most of whom were in Zouarké and Wour.<sup>34</sup>

Following the evacuation of the goldfield, the Chadian military maintained a presence on the ground, and the entire area was designated a military zone.<sup>35</sup> According to *passeurs* operating on routes through northern Chad, most movement targeting the goldfield was suspended as a result of the conflict and subsequent military deployment. Both licit and illicit flows of goods and equipment between Chad and Libya were also reportedly affected by the militarization of the area. In July, interviewees in Abeche reported that the disruption of trade between Libya and Chad, some of which takes place via Kouri 17, had negatively affected households in eastern Chad. The price of food staples, such as sugar, as well as fuel and cigarettes, all reportedly increased following the militarization of Kouri, in addition to price increases linked to the Ukraine war.



## HUMAN SMUGGLING ROUTES FROM CHAD TO NIGER CONSOLIDATE

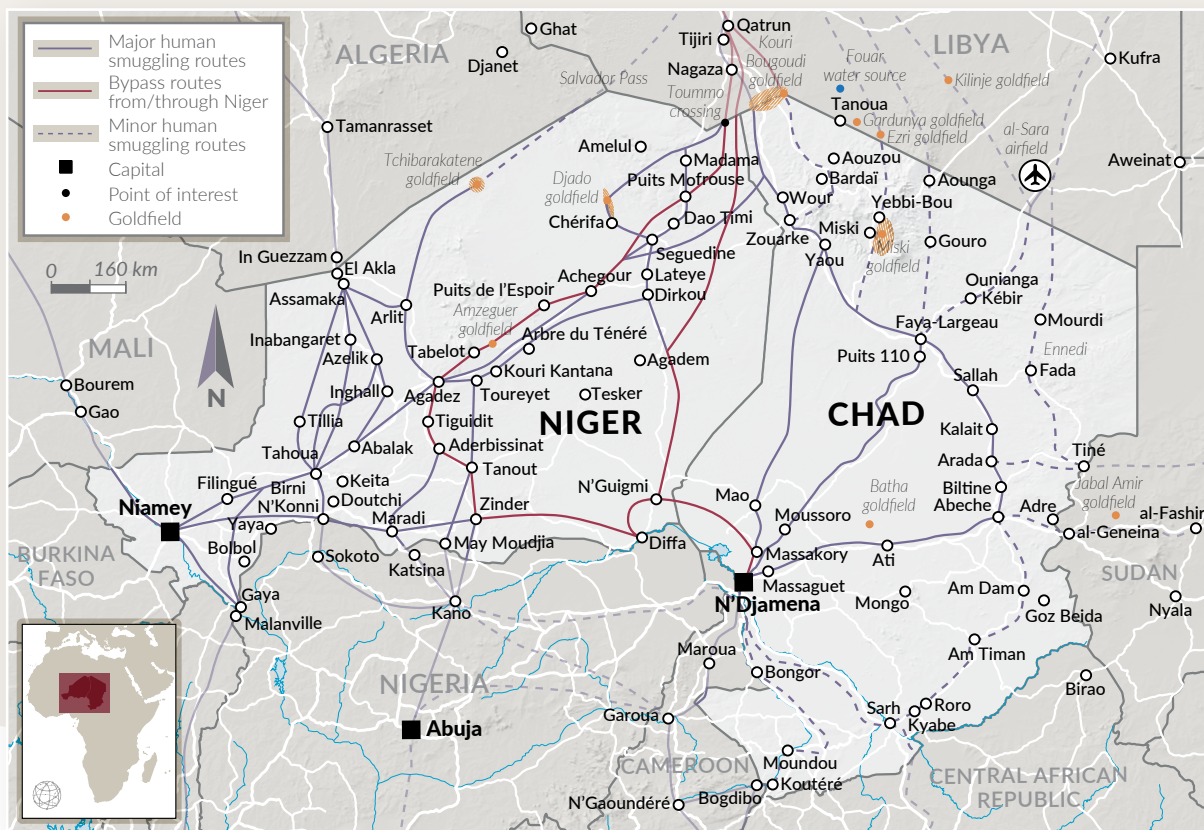
**W**ith continued challenges to northbound movements through the historic transport hubs of Mao and Moussoro in Kanem since the FACT incursion, some Chadians from the south of the country are increasingly travelling west through Niger to reach the goldfields in northern Chad and southern Libya.<sup>36</sup> While these routes have existed for decades, their use began to increase in mid to late 2021 and consolidated in 2022.

The main routes used to travel to Niger begin in N'Djamena and transit Bol, before crossing the Nigerien border to N'Guigmi (a small Nigerien town located 40 kilometres from the Chadian border and 120 kilometres north-east of Diffa). Informal transportation companies (known as *tacha* in Chad) ensure the regular transportation of passengers on pickup vehicles, making the transport both relatively easy and safe. As many as six vehicles (transporting around 90 people) usually travel daily on this route, according to *tacha* drivers interviewed in December 2022.

Once in Niger, migrants either employ a smuggler to travel across the desert from N'Guigmi to Dirkou, or take public transport from Diffa and Agadez, before employing smuggler services to Qatrun in Libya. From Qatrun, migrants use smuggler services to travel south to Kouri Bougoudi. This latter route, although longer (taking approximately 10 days) tends to be cheaper, due to the use of public transport and the higher number of passeurs in Agadez compared to N'Guigmi.

There are several reasons why routes from Chad to Niger and then Libya have gained in momentum compared to those that transit south to north within Chad. First, despite covering a greater distance, routes that transit Niger have more passeurs than those in Chad, ultimately reducing the waiting time before travel. Second, routes through Niger are far less risky for migrants. If caught in Niger, migrants found to be travelling illegally would generally be transferred to the IOM or released after paying a bribe. If caught in Chad, however, migrants can face arrest and imprisonment, especially if suspected of being a rebel.

The transport of Chadians between Niger and Libya is reportedly tolerated by Nigerien authorities in the same way as the transport of Nigerien nationals is, with neither falling under the 2015 anti-smuggling law.



**FIGURE 2** Human smuggling routes between Chad and Niger, December 2022.

According to Chadian drivers operating on this route, the majority of passengers are Chadian miners trying to reach the goldfields in northern Chad. However, the route is also known to be popular among Chadian and Sudanese migrants seeking economic opportunities in Niger's goldfields, some of whom intend to travel onwards to Libya or Algeria, and eventually Europe. Small numbers of migrants from other nationalities also use this route, including economic migrants from Cameroon and asylum seekers from the Central African Republic (CAR).

Chadian authorities are seemingly aware of the use of alternative itineraries and have demonstrated a willingness to curb any attempts to bypass restrictions in Chad. In October 2021, Chadian authorities engaged in a crackdown on vehicles transporting people across the border to Niger, reducing the number of vehicles travelling by at least half. According to tacha drivers interviewed, any passenger who could not provide a valid justification for their travel to Niger were arrested and taken to Mao, 200 kilometres north of N'Djamena, for further verifications.

The crackdown was only enforced for two weeks, however, presumably because of the military's strained resources. Security forces continue to be deployed on multiple fronts, including at the borders with Libya, Sudan, CAR and in the Lake Chad area, where the fight against Boko Haram remains a top priority. Given the ongoing constraints experienced by the military, the GI-TOC assesses that any attempt to disrupt human smuggling on this route is likely to be temporary.





Photo: GI-TOC





## SEPTEMBER REOPENING OF KOURI BOUGOUDI GOLDFIELD REVIVES REDUCED FLOWS

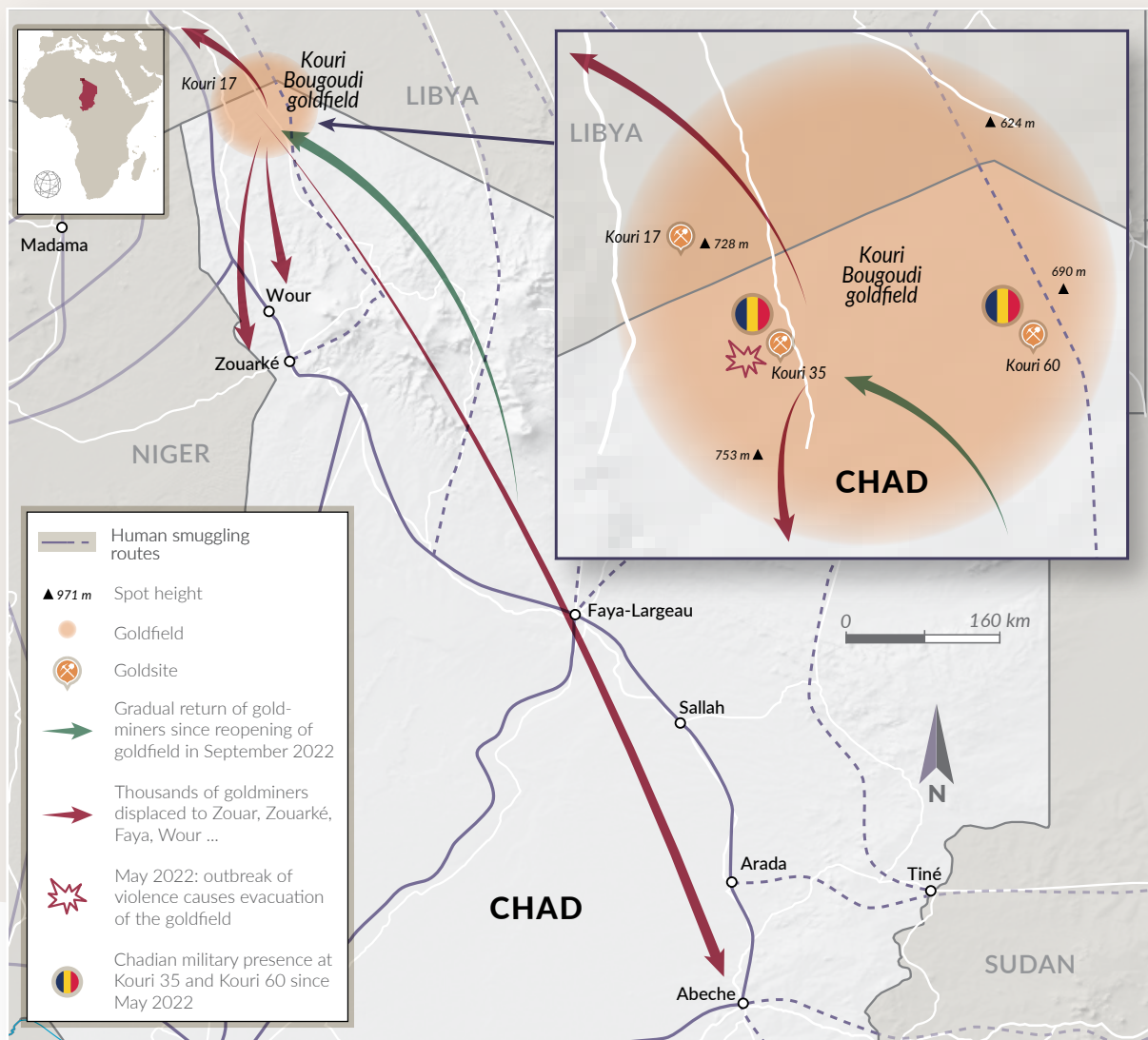
**O**n 19 September 2022, Chad's Société nationale d'exploitation minière et de contrôle (National society for the exploitation and control of mining – SONEMIC) announced the official reopening of the Kouri Bougoudi goldfield, after a four-month closure due to the interethnic clashes in May.<sup>37</sup>

Within days of the announcement, thousands of gold miners had returned to the goldfield, with estimates in December suggesting 18 000 to 20 000 individuals were in the area. Should the situation be sustained, arrivals are likely to continue throughout 2023. Most of these arrivals involved transit on the Abeche–Kouri Bougoudi and Sebha–Kouri Bougoudi axes, while flows from Kanem region have remained largely suppressed. According to interviews conducted in N'Djamena in December, a slight increase in the number of gold miners from N'Djamena, Massaguet and Mao travelling on routes through Niger to Kouri Bougoudi was observed in the month that followed its reopening.

The reopening of Kouri Bougoudi has had the positive impact of rebooting economic activities between Libya and Chad, especially on the Abeche–Kouri–Sebha economic axis, which had been frozen during the goldfield's closure. Prior to its closure, the large population of gold miners had stimulated demand for a range of lucrative auxiliary goods and services, providing both licit and illicit livelihoods for traders and smugglers operating between southern Libya and northern Chad.

While Kouri Bougoudi's reopening has meant that gold miners and other economic actors have been able to return to the goldfield, the most significant development pertains to the conditions of the goldfield's reopening. For SONEMIC to oversee the gold mining is a positive sign towards regularization of an economy that has up until now taken place clandestinely. For now, SONEMIC is only overseeing Kouri 35 and Kouri 60, two of the goldfield's major mining sites. Gold miners at these sites are officially required to register with SONEMIC, pay taxes (reportedly of 1 gram of gold per month) and renounce weapons at mining sites.<sup>38</sup> SONEMIC also reportedly requires the payment of FCFA100 000 (€152) for an 'access card', though it is unclear whether this is effectively in place in Kouri Bougoudi.





**FIGURE 3** Kouri Bougoudi goldfield.

These are positive steps towards making gold mining safer and profitable in the north; however, it is unclear how well SONEMIC's requirements have been properly implemented so far because some miners may not meet the necessary conditions for registration. For instance, according to interviewees in northern Chad, in order to register, gold miners need to present national ID cards and 'administrative documents'. Given that, according to the same interviewees, few gold miners possess ID cards, there is a risk that instead of conforming to set rules, some gold miners may displace to more remote and more dangerous areas of the goldfield that are beyond the oversight of Chadian security forces.

The official reopening of the Kouri Bougoudi goldfield could also provide a pathway for journeys to become legal for gold miners, as movements to northern Chad have been banned until now due to fears that they could feed into armed rebellion dynamics in the north and its cross-border areas with Libya. Although these fears are likely to remain with the two-year extension of Mahamat Déby's transitional government and the failure to rally the main rebel groups, the presence of the Chadian military at Kouri Bougoudi could contribute to decreased scrutiny and suspicion of northbound movements. Ultimately, the costs of regularizing travels to and from the goldfields, and risking that travel routes be used by rebels, may outweigh the costs of sustained economic pressure on local populations, especially given the anti-government sentiment and political instability that has developed in the country over the past year.



SONEMIC officials meet with gold miners at Kouri Bougoudi, 7 December 2022. *Photo: SONEMIC Tchad Twitter page*





## CONCLUSION

**H**uman smuggling in Chad was mostly reduced in 2022, as dynamics were closely tied to the political and security situation in the country, and especially due to rebel activity in northern Chad. These dynamics are likely to be maintained in 2023, with General Mahamat Déby in the presidency for the coming two years. Routes through Niger are likely to see continued use through 2023, as northbound movements, especially through the Kanem region, remain less attractive for migrants travelling north. Despite attempts by the military to disrupt displacing human smuggling flows to Niger, these are likely to continue to remain short-term efforts, due to the capacity constraints experienced by the security forces.

Nonetheless, the official reopening of Kouri Bougoudi since September could change migration dynamics should transportation also become more officialized on routes that link Chad's major hubs, especially Abeche in eastern Chad, to the goldfields. It is likely that footfall on these routes will increase during 2023, as the reopening of the goldfield – should the situation remain stable – may incentivize prospective miners to seek opportunities in Kouri Bougoudi now that they are no longer clandestine.

The shift that took place in 2022 is therefore not a return to the situation prior to the closure of Kouri Bougoudi, but rather the evolution of a new context in which gold mining could become both regularized and regulated, and in which the Chadian government, military and national mining company could play a significant role.

While this is a positive step towards regularizing and making gold mining safer in the region, regulations will need to be accessible and realistic for them to be implemented by gold miners. Further, government involvement and control over gold mining in the Tibesti remains a deep-rooted source of tension, as demonstrated in January 2023 when clashes broke out between the Chadian military and the Miski self-defence committee. Though these tensions were also triggered by broader political dynamics and the involvement of a new rebel group, the Mouvement d'Action pour la Démocratie et l'Alternance au Tchad (Movement of action for democracy and change in Chad), control over gold mining in the Tibesti lies at the heart of long-standing grievances and conflict between communities and Chadian authorities.<sup>39</sup> The management of gold mining resources and the regulation of activities in Kouri Bougoudi therefore need to be both transparent and conflict sensitive, in order to reduce the risk of further grievances and violence.

Beyond localized risks in the north, Chad also faces persisting political tensions as a result of the shortfalls of the national dialogue process. In the aftermath of the violent crackdown on protesters in October 2022, several human rights organizations have called for independent investigations into the human rights violations committed by Chadian security forces, and tensions among local civil society and communities remain high.<sup>40</sup> In 2023, such grievances could translate into further destabilization risks for the transitional government, with rumours of a new rebellion – reportedly formed in southern Chad in January 2023, in part as a result of the October crackdown.<sup>41</sup> If true, this represents a worrying development in a context of already strained relations between Chad and the CAR.<sup>42</sup> The situation in southern Chad therefore also requires monitoring, as further deterioration could also drive departures.

Overall, local grievances over the extended transition process, the pull factor of gold mining in the north, as well as other socio-economic factors, compounded by the war in Ukraine, are likely to have a strong influence on migration dynamics in the country in 2023 by further boosting the drivers of emigration, especially for Chad's youth who have few economic alternatives than to leave Chad. However, it is unclear whether the human smuggling economy will be able to respond to revamped demand for migration, given the likelihood of continued government crackdowns in the north linked to the government's war against rebels. As a result, the GI-TOC assesses that the price for northbound migrant smuggling services is likely to remain high and human smuggling routes targeting eastern Niger instead of northern Chad are likely to see continued use throughout 2023.

In 2023, the political, security and humanitarian situation in Chad will also be impacted by the conflict in neighbouring Sudan. The outbreak of fighting on 15 April 2023 between two rival security forces, the Sudanese Armed Forces led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by Mohamed 'Hemedti' Hamdan Dagalo, led to massive internal displacement and refugee flows to Chad. By early June, over 100 000 people were believed to have fled to Chad, including Sudanese refugees, Chadian returnees and foreign nationals.<sup>43</sup> This massive influx of vulnerable refugee and returnee populations to eastern Chad has placed further strain on limited assistance capacities in Chad, which already hosts around 400 000 Sudanese refugees.<sup>44</sup> The humanitarian situation in eastern Chad will therefore require close monitoring to assess risks and vulnerabilities faced by newly arrived refugees and potential impacts on human smuggling dynamics.

The conflict in Sudan also poses significant new challenges to Chad due to the complex and long-standing interconnections between political and security dynamics in the two countries. Preliminary information suggests Chadian fighters based in Libya may be drawn into the fighting in Sudan. Besides the longstanding community ties and shared interests between Chadian rebel groups and the RSF, the unfolding chaos in Sudan also represents significant opportunities for Chadian groups to access weapons, vehicles and equipment, as well as lucrative looting and trafficking activities.

The involvement of Chadian rebel groups in Sudan could not only intensify the level of violence of the conflict – including by exacerbating intercommunity violence –, it could also increase the abilities of and heighten opportunities for these groups to launch renewed offensives in Chad.

Intercommunity violence in Sudan could also trigger renewed tensions in gold mining areas in Chad, where associated communities are present. Chad's fragile stability – and that of the entire Sahel region – is therefore seriously threatened by the Sudanese crisis and is now highly contingent on a positive outcome of ongoing peace talks between rival factions.



## Notes

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