HUMAN SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING ECOSYSTEMS
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NIGER

HUMAN SMUGGLING AFFECTED BY CONFLICT AND LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

Alice Fereday | Rhoumour Ahmet Tchilouta

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alice Fereday is a senior analyst with the GI-TOC's Observatory of Illicit Economies in North Africa and the Sahel. 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.

Rhoumour Ahmet Tchilouta is a political geographer, consultant and associate researcher at Grenoble Alpes University. He researches EU–Sahel cooperation on migration and border management, human trafficking and smuggling, border violence, and the socio-political dynamics of artisanal gold mining in the Sahara–Sahel. He holds a PhD in political geography from Grenoble Alpes University and Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey.

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

CONTENTS

Acronyms and abbreviations iv

Introduction **1**

Methodology 2

Key points 3

Dynamics shaping the migration context in Niger **4**

Post-coup transition timeline blurs as political, security and humanitarian situation worsens 4

International partnerships marked by gradual reopening and diversification 6

Growing number of armed groups and security challenges in northern Niger 9

Key trends and developments in human smuggling **14**

Legislative changes affect movement of foreign migrants 14

Instability affects human smuggling 16

Conclusion **22**

Notes 24

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AES	Alliance des États du Sahel (Alliance of Sahel States)
CCMSR	Conseil de Commandement Militaire pour le Salut de la République (Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic)
CNSP	Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FACT	Front pour l'Alternance et la Concorde au Tchad (Front for Change and Concord in Chad)
FPL	Front Patriotique de Libération (Patriotic Liberation Front)
GI-TOC	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
GNU	Government of National Unity
IS Sahel	Islamic State Sahel Province
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group to Support Islam and Muslims)
LAAF	Libyan Arab Armed Forces
MPLJ	Mouvement Patriotique pour la Liberté et la Justice (Patriotic Movement for Freedom and Justice)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNVP	Union des Nigériens pour la Vigilance et le Patriotisme (Union of Nigeriens for Vigilance and Patriotism)
WFP	World Food Programme



INTRODUCTION

Between 2025 and the middle of 2026, human smuggling dynamics through Niger were marked by two major developments: Niger introduced legislation tightening control of foreign movement; and conflict in southern Libya from February 2025 severed routes to Libya, pushing demand – and many of the *passeurs* (smugglers) who served it – onto routes to Algeria instead.

These changes took place in the broader context of a resurgence in human smuggling through Niger. In 2024 and the beginning of 2025, the repeal of anti-smuggling legislation had driven increases in movement on both routes. *Passeurs* openly resumed departures in key hubs, rather than relying on the remote routes they had previously favoured. Obstacles persisted – the continued closure of the Benin border chief among them, alongside insecurity on routes to Niger – but mobility through the country and onward to Libya and Algeria was broadly facilitated.

The new legislation on foreign movement marked a deliberate shift in Niger's migration policy and had a significant effect on the conditions of travel despite its uneven enforcement: rather than reducing movements, the legislation's main consequence was to increase the size of bribes paid by migrants during their transit through Niger, raising costs and in some cases dissuading migrants from travel. This affected the business of *passeurs*, who reported decreased demand because of the legislation.

However, the main disruption came when instability in southern Libya severely disrupted movement towards Libya. The conflict, which began with clashes in Qatrun in February 2025 and escalated into open warfare in January 2026, drew in Libyan armed groups opposing the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), Nigerien and Chadian rebel groups and mercenaries, and Nigerien vigilante groups, with fighting and military operations spilling into northern Niger. It also strained relations between Nigerien authorities and Libya's rival administrations, crystallizing internal fragmentation within the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie, CNSP), Niger's ruling military junta.

The impact on human smuggling between Niger and Libya was severe. Movements ceased for several weeks when the Qatrun clashes broke out and struggled to recover for the rest of 2025. When conflict erupted along the border in January 2026, the disruption was more severe still, halting most departures and pushing what little movement remained into the Salvador Pass, a dangerous route near the Algeria–Niger–Libya triborder area long used for trafficking. Many *passeurs* operating on routes to Libya sought alternative sources of income, and some shifted their activities to transport to Algeria, which has seen growing demand since 2025.

These dynamics illustrate how Niger's human smuggling landscape is affected by its neighbours' stability. Where previous disruption was typically linked to insecurity on routes to Niger, this time it originated further downstream.

The developments also took place in a rapidly changing context. Niger's post-coup transition has given way to the entrenchment of military rule, institutional consolidation and a further contraction of civic space. General Abdourahamane Tiani's March 2025 inauguration as president under the Charter of Refoundation, the transitional constitutional document, left no roadmap to elections. At the same time, the security situation has worsened, with record numbers of conflict-related deaths and an August 2026 mutiny at Air Base 101 exposing fractures in the security apparatus, while economic and humanitarian conditions have further deteriorated for Nigeriens and migrants. These dynamics have implications for human smuggling. As well as raising risks for migrants reaching Niger, they have reduced economic opportunities within the country, fuelling the departure of both Nigeriens and foreign migrants.

Niger's reshaped international partnerships have also played a role in reframing the migration context, particularly its relationships with neighbouring Benin and Algeria and their implications for cross-border movements.

This is the latest Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) monitoring report on human smuggling in Niger. It builds on the series of annual reports issued since 2017 that track developments in human smuggling in Niger and the political, security and economic dynamics that influence it.[1] It first details internal and international dynamics shaping the migration context before examining the key developments in human smuggling during the reporting period. The report ends with a brief look ahead at potential trends in the coming year.

Methodology

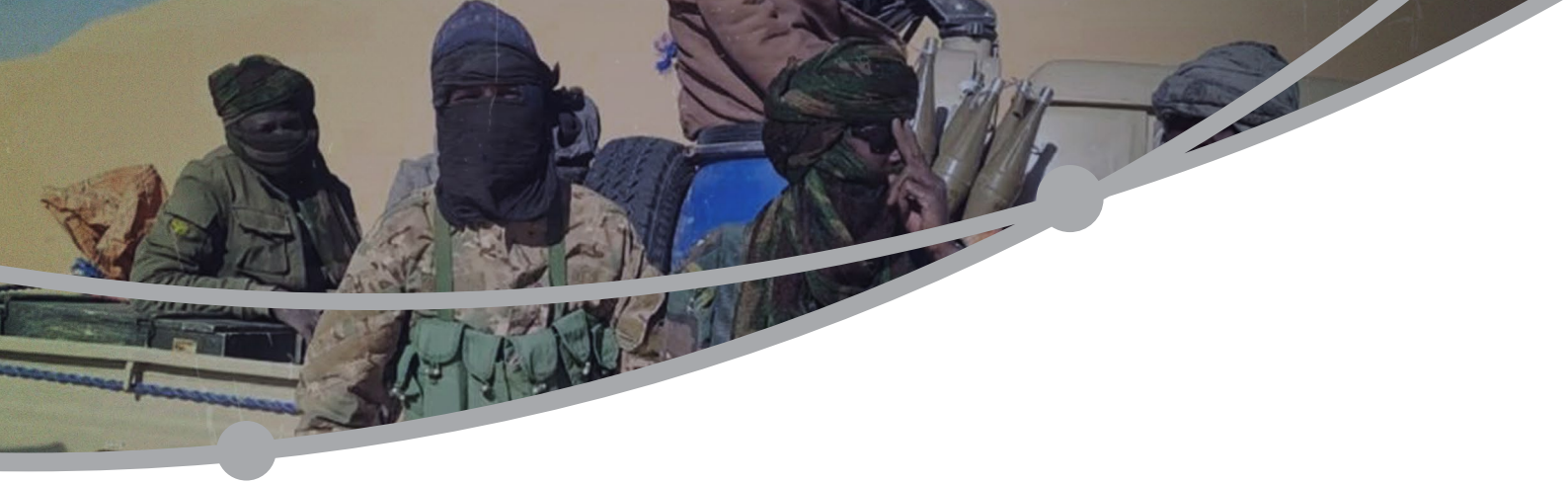
This brief is based on the GI-TOC's field monitoring system. Between January 2025 and June 2026, the reporting period for this study, the GI-TOC collected data through semi-structured interviews with smugglers, migrants, community members, transporters, NGO personnel, international observers and others.

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 and validate interviews conducted by researchers.

Care has been taken to triangulate the information. However, the issues detailed in the 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 changing dynamics in Niger and the broader region.

Key points

- During the reporting period, human smuggling occurred in a context of worsening political, security and humanitarian dynamics, with escalating civilian deaths, violent extremist group attacks and displacement. In northern Niger, growing armed group presence and conflict at the Libyan border triggered major instability and diplomatic tensions between Niger and Libya.
- At the same time, Niger's post-coup transition gave way to open-ended institutionalization. General Tiani's March 2025 inauguration as president under the Charter of Refoundation left no roadmap to elections, while an August 2026 mutiny at Air Base 101 exposed fractures in the security apparatus that sustains it.
- Niger's diversification of international partnerships has also contributed to shaping the migration context. Deepening cooperation with Algeria and Russia and a tentative reopening to Benin are significant developments. Although the impact on human smuggling during the reporting period was limited, these factors are likely to be determining for the trajectory of human smuggling in 2027.
- Between 2025 and mid-2026, several major developments reshaped human smuggling. The first took the form of legislative change. Ordinance 2025–02 recast Niger's legal framework for foreign movement but has not curbed it. Enforcement is uneven, and the law's clearest effect to date has been to raise the size of bribes migrants pay at checkpoints rather than to reduce movement.
- However, the most significant factor shaping human smuggling dynamics since 2025 has been conflict at the Libyan border, which has profoundly disrupted movements to Libya. Instability in southern Libya began in early 2025 with clashes in Qatrun, and in January 2026 it escalated into major armed conflict between the LAAF and Libyan rebels based in Niger.
- This upended movements to Libya, pushing many *passeurs* to find alternative sources of income such as gold mining or fuel smuggling. Those who continued limited departures to Libya were forced to avoid areas heavily controlled or surveilled by the LAAF, pushing human smuggling to circuitous, remote and often dangerous routes through the Salvador Pass or northern Chad.
- Movements were also rerouted to Algeria, with fluctuating demand for travel since 2025 in Tahoua, the main departure hub, and the creation of a new route connecting Agadez to Algeria.
- By mid-2026, the escalation of conflict at the Libyan border, increasing threats from Nigerien rebel groups and heightened tensions between Niger, Libya and Chad had further affected northbound movements and are likely to continue shaping dynamics in northern Niger into 2027.



DYNAMICS SHAPING THE MIGRATION CONTEXT IN NIGER

Since the July 2023 coup, three overlapping sets of dynamics have shaped the context in which migrants move to, through and from Niger. The first is domestic. Under the Charter of Refoundation promulgated in March 2025, the CNSP has stopped managing a transition and started entrenching military rule. There is no roadmap to elections, and the regime has tightened its grip on political opponents, journalists and civil society. At the same time, security has deteriorated sharply on several fronts: conflict-related deaths reached a post-coup high in 2025, attacks reached Niamey in 2026, and more than a million people are now displaced. These pressures are pushing more Nigeriens to look for work abroad, particularly in Libya, and leaving migrants in transit more vulnerable.

The second concerns Niger's international partnerships. After nearly three years of self-imposed isolation, the regime has begun to open up. Free movement within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has largely survived Niger's withdrawal from the bloc. Relations with Benin and Algeria have warmed markedly, and ties with Russia have deepened, though within narrow limits. Each of these shifts affects the borders and corridors that migrants rely on.

The third and most significant factor for human smuggling during the reporting period is growing insecurity in northern Niger. Endemic banditry and the activity of Nigerien and Chadian rebel groups have combined with spillover from southern Libya, where the newly formed Revolutionaries of the South are fighting the LAAF. Much of this has converged on the cross-border area between Niger and Libya, at the heart of the smuggling routes to Libya.

Post-coup transition timeline blurs as political, security and humanitarian situation worsens

As of mid-2026, the CNSP, Niger's ruling military junta, has moved from post-coup transition management to open-ended institutionalization. The three-year transition announced after the 2023 coup quietly disappeared from official discourse in mid-2024. In February 2025, the National Consultations for Refoundation, a gathering of more than 700 delegates, recommended a renewable, 'flexible' five-year transition indexed on the security situation and on the agenda of the Alliance of Sahel States (Alliance des États du Sahel, AES). It also recommended the dissolution of political parties and

conferred on General Abdourahamane Tiani the title of President of the Republic.[2] Tiani formalized these recommendations on 26 March 2025 by promulgating the Charter of Refoundation, which replaced the suspended constitutional order. He was sworn in as president under its terms and elevated to the rank of army general, and a Consultative Council for Refoundation has since stood in for representative institutions.[3] By the first anniversary of the charter in March 2026, the junta had further entrenched military rule with no roadmap towards democratic elections.

Alongside the institutional consolidation, coercion has tightened. Former president Mohamed Bazoum has remained in detention at the presidential residence since July 2023, despite repeated international demands for his release.

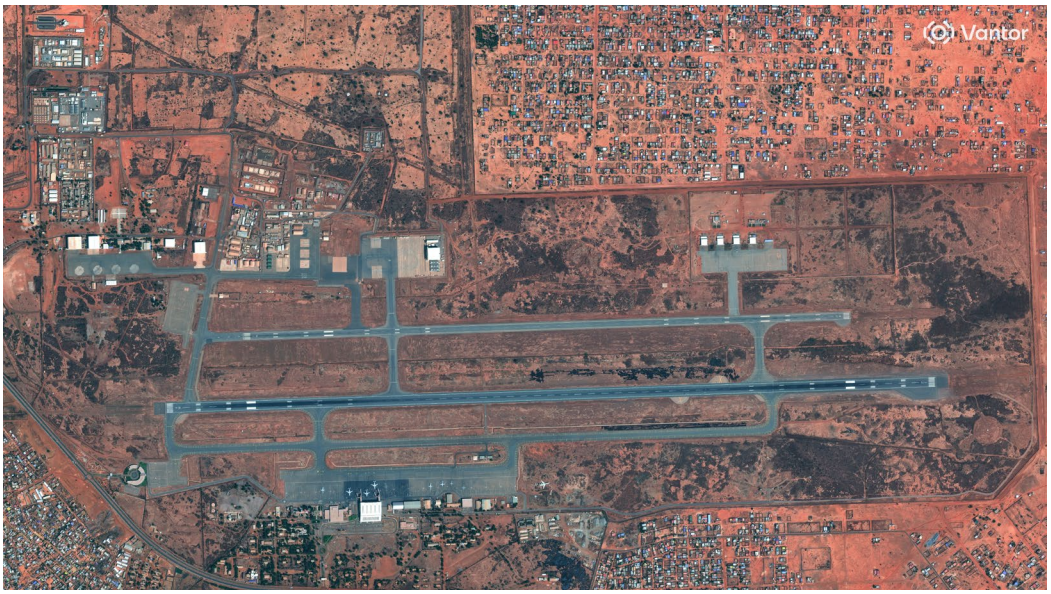
The junta has used the ordinance of 27 August 2024 (amended on 7 October 2024) that created a register of people deemed to threaten the nation's fundamental interests to strip at least 20 individuals of their nationality on a 'provisional' basis – most recently two figures associated with the former regime in April 2026.[4] Journalists, civil society figures and humanitarian organizations face suspension, expulsion or arrest, and several international NGOs have had their licences revoked.[5]

The security situation deteriorated sharply in 2025, and into 2026, in three distinct but increasingly connected theatres. In the west, Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) and the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, JNIM) have continued to expand. In the south-east, the Boko Haram splinter groups Islamic State West Africa Province and Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad have seen a resurgence. In the north, anti-CNSP armed groups and endemic banditry have severely affected the gold, transport and migration economies without contesting territory. These dynamics have all disrupted movement on the smuggling routes West African migrants use to reach Niger and increased risks on routes through the country.

In 2025, conflict-related deaths rose to 1 949, a post-coup high, compared with 1 156 in 2023.[6] The Tillabéri region accounted for more than 1 200 fatalities in 2025, making it the central Sahel's most lethal region. Civilians were targeted primarily by IS Sahel, followed by the Nigerien military, then JNIM.[7] The level of violence against civilians on behalf of AES state security forces has in turn driven recruitment dynamics, pushing civilians to seek protection from violent extremist groups and allowing these groups to capitalize on state violence to drive civilian recruitment.

On 29 January 2026, insecurity reached the capital when IS Sahel staged a complex pre-dawn attack on Diori Hamani International Airport in Niamey and the adjacent Air Base 101 involving both ground forces and explosive-laden drones – the first recorded drone attack in Niger and the first major assault on the capital.[8] Twenty attackers were killed and four soldiers were wounded. Some observers saw the attack as a qualitative escalation marking IS Sahel's shift towards sophisticated infrastructure targeting.[9]

IS Sahel claimed responsibility for the operation, though the government blamed France, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire – who have been repeatedly accused of destabilization attempts in Niger since the 2023 coup due to their perceived anti-CNSP positioning.[10] A deadlier attack struck the same complex on 18 June 2026, when JNIM claimed responsibility for a coordinated assault on the airport and Air Base 101 that killed 11 soldiers and two civilians, confirming the base's recurring exposure to rival jihadist networks. An attack on Tahoua airport and the adjacent Air Base 401 had already taken place in March 2026.[11]



Vantor satellite image showing an overview of Niamey airport runway and surrounding military bases following an attack in the Nigerien capital on 29 January 2026. *© 2026 Vantor via Getty Images*

Humanitarian consequences are now at crisis levels. By the end of June 2026, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recorded more than a million forcibly displaced people in Niger, including 548 000 internally displaced and 456 000 refugees and asylum seekers, mostly of Nigerian origin.[12] According to the UN's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, some 2.4 million people were projected to face severe food insecurity in 2026, with 1.2 million children suffering from acute malnutrition, a situation compounded by an annual loss of 100 000 hectares of productive land to desertification.[13] School closures, shrinking humanitarian access under tightened NGO regulation, and funding gaps facing the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UNHCR further compound the pressure on rural Tillabéri, Diffa, Tahoua and Dosso.[14]

The deteriorating security, political, economic and humanitarian situation has affected living conditions and livelihood opportunities, driving many Nigeriens to seek employment in neighbouring countries, particularly in Libya where circular migration patterns are well established. Migrants transiting through Niger face harsh living conditions, with few opportunities to work locally to fund onward journeys. This can increase the vulnerability of those stranded in key transit towns.

International partnerships marked by gradual reopening and diversification

One of the main international dynamics affecting the migration context during the reporting period was Niger's relations with regional bodies such as ECOWAS and the AES. Niger's withdrawal from ECOWAS, announced in 2024 with the other AES states, Mali and Burkina Faso, took effect on 29 January 2025.[15]

Since then, AES integration has consolidated: a joint levy on imports has been developed to finance common institutions, an AES passport was introduced in January 2025, and a unified military force is operating.[16] The AES framework now largely structures Niamey's diplomacy on issues ranging from joint withdrawal from international institutions to positions on Algeria, Morocco and the coastal states.



Since the closure of the Benin–Niger border in 2023, smugglers have offered clandestine crossings of the Niger river separating the two countries. *Photo: GI-TOC*

Despite initial tensions between the AES and ECOWAS, pragmatism has prevailed. The ECOWAS Commission has provisionally maintained recognition of AES passports, visa-free movement, residence and establishment rights, and participation in the regional free-trade scheme, and the AES has reciprocated, committing in December 2024 to visa-free entry and residence for ECOWAS citizens.[17] Consultations in Bamako in May 2025 confirmed both sides' interest in preserving free movement and trade pending a permanent agreement.[18] Niger's exit from ECOWAS has therefore produced little change for cross-border mobility along most of its borders.

The one ECOWAS border where free movement remains affected is the Malanville–Gaya crossing between Niger and Benin, which has been closed since the 2023 coup. However, the first half of 2026 saw a substantial thaw in the relationship between the two countries, raising hopes for the crossing's reopening.

The improved relations emerged after the inauguration in Benin of President Romuald Wadagni on 24 May 2026. His 2 June visit to Niamey, where he was received with full honours and considerable ceremony, in deliberate contrast with hostility towards the presidency of Patrice Talon (2016–2026) after the 2023 coup, produced a nine-point joint communiqué committing both states to relaunch cooperation, revive the Niger–Benin commission (a diplomatic body established in July 2004 to resolve political and economic tensions, particularly concerning border access and oil export disputes), and remove obstacles to reopening the border.[19] While the border remains closed, with Niamey making a reopening conditional on a new defence agreement, transparency over foreign military activity near the frontier and a joint intelligence unit, it is plausible that it could be reopened in late 2026 or 2027.[20] This would be a major development for migrant movement to and through Niger, potentially driving heightened foreign migrant flows on Nigerien routes to Algeria or Libya.

Relations have also warmed substantially between Niger and Algeria in 2026. The relationship was tense throughout 2024 and 2025, with record migrant expulsions by Algeria into Nigerien territory and a major diplomatic crisis between Algiers and the AES following Mali's rupture with the Algiers

Accord – the Malian peace agreement brokered by Algeria in 2015. These tensions came to a head in April 2025 with Niamey's decision to join Bamako and Ouagadougou in recalling its ambassador from Algiers after Algeria shot down a Malian drone near Tinzaouaten.[21]

However, this shifted in early 2026. In January, Algeria's energy minister visited Niamey, and Tiani visited Algiers a month later.[22] For Niamey, an improved relationship with Algeria serves several purposes. It creates an alternative, Mediterranean-facing route to export energy and import trade goods; advances Niger's aim of becoming a substantial petrol producer and allows it to diversify away from the China National Petroleum Corporation, its main extraction partner; and provides a framework for managing the sensitive topic of expulsions at the shared border. For Algiers, while economic benefits are important, the main driver probably hinges on regional political interests, in that it helps to rebuild its influence in the Sahel after it was marginalized by the AES's tilt towards Moscow.

The improved relationship has translated into economic substance with unusual speed, particularly in the oil and energy sector. A joint venture is being developed for oil and gas drilling operations and cooperation in the distribution of petroleum products, with work relaunched on the long-dormant Kafra oil block in Niger's far north in August 2026.[23]

Nonetheless, shared economic activities in northern Niger, particularly Kafra, come with security and political-economy risks. Kafra is in the same far-northern space as the Tchibarakatene goldfield, Algeria-bound migration routes, the migrant expulsion corridor through Assamaka and the operating zones of anti-CNSP armed groups. Any development there will depend on – and further militarize – the convoy-and-escort system that structures movement in the region and insert a major fixed asset into a borderland where informal economies (gold, fuel, transport, migration services) are at the heart of local livelihoods. While the economic venture will boost state revenues, its local impact may be more complex. Tensions around the management of the extractive sector and the redistribution of its resources, particularly when foreign actors are involved, are deeply rooted in a region where gold and uranium mining have long been sources of unrest. In the neighbouring Agadem area to the south-east, tensions around oil have fed not only local grievances but recruitment by rebel groups targeting the oil infrastructure. These dynamics are crucial to the migration context as human smuggling is vulnerable to instability.



A convoy of buses transports migrants expelled from Algeria to Niger near In Guezzam, located on the border, May 2026. *Photo: GI-TOC*

Finally, in line with the AES's alignment with Russia, Niger has continued to strengthen its cooperation with Moscow, though unlike Mali and Burkina Faso this has remained limited to regime protection and strategic minerals rather than the territorial deployment of large ground combat units. Since April 2024, only a small number of Russian personnel and air-defence systems have been based in Niamey.[24] These forces have occasionally played small but important roles in responding to security incidents, such as the assault on the international airport in January 2026.[25]

As with its engagement in other AES states, Moscow's economic cooperation with Niger has largely focused on mining. The eviction of French companies from the uranium sector in the north of the country in 2024, followed by its nationalization in June 2025, paved the way for a reported agreement in November 2025 to sell about 1 000 tonnes of stockpiled yellowcake (a powdered form of uranium concentrate) to Rosatom, the Russian state-owned nuclear energy corporation.[26] However, for now, Russian involvement in the gold sector and – importantly – deployment in the Agadez region remains unconfirmed, despite rumours and concerns of similar involvement in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Overall, Russia's presence in Niger remains modest and largely limited to Niamey, and it has had no measurable effect on human smuggling dynamics. Its role in containing the August 2026 mutiny, however, shows that the regime's survival now partly depends on it. If worsening security conditions in south-western or northern Niger lead to a broader request for Russian combat forces, or if Russian involvement in the extractive sector in the north deepens – and triggers local tensions – the implications for human smuggling could become more direct and acute.

Niger's deepening ties with Russia and diversification towards Algeria are central to the diplomatic balancing act that allows the regime to stay afloat and maintain a degree of stability, on which the human smuggling industry relies. Ties with partners that offer security and defence cooperation in exchange for access to the extractive sector are essential to secure the regime and fill the vacuum left by former partners.

Growing number of armed groups and security challenges in northern Niger

Dynamics in northern Niger continue to be shaped by insecurity. Armed banditry is endemic in the Agadez region and on routes connecting Niger, Algeria and Libya. The banditry, partly fed by actors displaced from the smuggling economy after 2015 and incompletely reabsorbed since 2023, targets licit and illicit trade, and in particular gold mining.[27] It has also affected human smuggling, though the decriminalization of human smuggling in late 2023 reduced the need to use the more circuitous routes that are typically targeted by bandits.

Nigerien and foreign rebel groups have continued to operate across northern Niger and cross-border areas with Algeria, Libya and Chad. The main Nigerien rebel groups are the Patriotic Liberation Front (Front Patriotique de Libération, FPL) and two of its splinter groups, the Patriotic Movement for Freedom and Justice (Mouvement Patriotique pour la Liberté et la Justice, MPLJ) and the Patriotic Front for Justice (Front Patriotique pour la Justice). At the beginning of 2025, FPL founder Mahmoud Salah was arrested in southern Libya, where what remained of the group was based after the surrender of some members in 2024 and the defection of others into the splinter groups. The MPLJ was the most active throughout 2025, with several attacks mostly targeting the Agadem oil pipeline.[28] However, Salah was released in June 2026, and with considerable material support from its former adversary, the LAAF, the FPL remobilized with renewed threats to the CNSP.[29]



Fighters belonging to the Patriotic Movement for Freedom and Justice pictured near Joh, south of Bilma, February 2026. The group launched an attack on the Agadem oil pipeline the same month. *Photo: GI-TOC*

At the same time, and with intersecting dynamics, Chadian rebel groups have maintained a presence in northern Niger. After major recomposition, surrender and pressure from the LAAF in southern Libya, what remained of the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (Front pour l'Alternance et la Concorde au Tchad, FACT) and the Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic (Conseil de Commandement Militaire pour le Salut de la République, CCMSR) relocated to northern Niger in 2024, concentrating in the area around the Salvador Pass. Though their presence remained discreet throughout 2025, members of these groups became engaged in illicit economies, in particular armed banditry and gold mining. Their presence in Niger, involvement in predation and friction with local groups were also highlighted by several notable events.

In September 2025, supposed FACT members attacked a convoy travelling between Tchibarakatene goldfield and the Salvador Pass. Though public reporting presented this incident as a banditry attack on a convoy transporting gold, some sources indicate the vehicles were carrying a large shipment of cocaine.[30] This triggered a pursuit led by the Union of Nigeriens for Vigilance and Patriotism (Union des Nigériens pour la Vigilance et le Patriotisme, UNVP), a pro-CNSP vigilante group, which ended two days later with a significant clash near the Salvador Pass.

However, the most significant development affecting security in northern Niger was the outbreak of conflict in southern Libya. On 12 February 2025, conflict erupted between the LAAF and members of a former component unit of the 128th Brigade, which was dissolved in early 2025, led by Saleh 'Anakazi' Abdelkarim Habré, a Chadian mercenary.[31] This episode of violence was followed by a series of raids in Qatrun and surrounding areas, mainly targeting foreigners suspected of having links to Anakazi. Contacts also reported a broader crackdown on any foreign actors perceived to be involved in illicit economies, including smugglers (known locally as *passeurs*).

Ultimately, some 130 fighters belonging to Anakazi, equipped with 30 armed vehicles, withdrew towards the Salvador Pass on the Nigerien border.[32] These forces were joined by other former-LAAF fighters from across southern Libya who were dissatisfied with the restructuring led by the LAAF in 2025, as well as anti-LAAF actors.

For the remainder of 2025, these groups maintained a discreet presence in border areas and Nigerien territory near the Salvador Pass, engaging in illicit economies such as drug trafficking and armed banditry.

By January 2026, after a period of recomposition, members of these groups formed the Revolutionaries of the South, a largely Tebu group of fighters who had previously been based in southern Libya. Many of them had been active with the LAAF in southern Libya, though they deserted after Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's security sector reforms. Other non-LAAF fighters involved in the new group had previously fled from southern Libya after the Qatrun clashes in early 2025.

On 31 January 2026, the Revolutionaries of the South launched several coordinated attacks along the Libya–Niger border. They targeted the Toummo port of entry, the main border post between Niger and Libya; Bograra, a secondary border post 50 kilometres north-west of Toummo; and a border berm on the Libyan side of the Salvador Pass, a corridor between Libya and Niger that is not typically used for formal movements and is favoured by smugglers.[33] The Revolutionaries of the South temporarily seized control of Toummo before withdrawing the same day. In response, the LAAF closed Libya's borders with Niger, Chad and Sudan, and deployed units to conduct border patrols and surveillance.

In February, the military escalation featured several ambush operations, cross-border raids and attacks. On 24 February, fighters affiliated with the Revolutionaries of the South ambushed an LAAF patrol near the Niger border, with the captured fighters subsequently released after an LAAF counterattack into Nigerien territory.[34] The incursion targeted Revolutionaries of the South positions near Wadi Achélouma, about 130 kilometres south of the Libyan border. According to a Revolutionaries of the South leader, the LAAF recruited about 150 Chadian fighters to take part in the attack, but the claim is difficult to verify.



The aftermath of the LAAF counterattack on Revolutionaries of the South positions in Wadi Achélouma, March 2026. *Photo: GI-TOC*

In mid-2026, the Revolutionaries of the South focused on internal restructuring, recruitment and training of fighters, building local support, and strengthening operational and logistical capacities. To do so, the group reportedly established ties with CCMSR and FACT. According to a Revolutionaries of the South commander, fighters affiliated with CCMSR and FACT provide ad hoc military support when needed in exchange for money, food or fuel.

> *Today, our priority is to organize the group and ensure strong local support to hold our positions and prepare new attacks. We are also working on logistics and means of mobility, in particular vehicles and rotations between the different zones. There are contacts in several directions to try to secure support and improve our capacity on the ground.*
>
> INTERVIEW WITH A REVOLUTIONARIES OF THE SOUTH COMMANDER, MAY 2026

In addition to restructuring and consolidation, the Revolutionaries of the South targeted trafficking activities linked to the LAAF in the Salvador Pass, claiming to have intercepted several networks of cocaine and other drug traffickers.

LAAF activities in mid-2026 aimed to consolidate control of the Nigerien border and strengthen its military capacities in the area, with a focus on curbing clandestine movement. This involved increasing patrols and operations. In April, it deployed several units to the Salvador Pass, including the 173rd Commando Brigade, the 628th Border Guard Battalion and the 87th Rapid Intervention Battalion. These units conduct patrols along routes connecting the Salvador Pass to Ubari, Qatrun and other passage points, such as Bograra and Toummo. These operations target not only the Revolutionaries of the South but any clandestine movement, such as human smuggling and fuel smuggling.

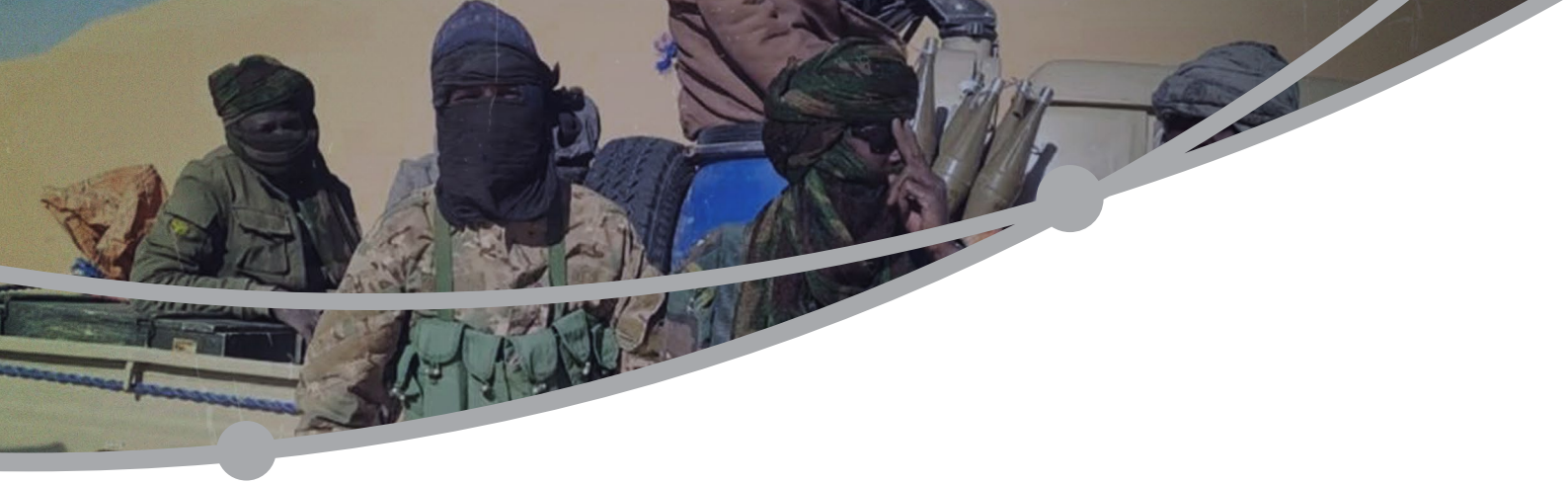
This has had implications for migrant smuggling, with the 173rd Commando Brigade intercepting several migrant convoys. At times these operations have turned violent, and two *passeurs* were reportedly killed in separate incidents, including one on 22 May while attempting to flee during an LAAF interception.

On 13 June, an air strike, reportedly conducted by the Nigerien military, targeting the Revolutionaries of the South near Wadi Achélouma killed four people, including two FACT members and a close relative of the Revolutionaries of the South leader Mohamed Wardago. Six days later, on 19 June, the Nigerien military reportedly attempted to attack the Revolutionaries of the South near the Salvador Pass but were ambushed while approaching their positions. Sources close to the Revolutionaries of the South claimed 33 Nigerien soldiers were killed and 20 captured, though others estimate higher Nigerien casualties and at least 10 fatalities among the Revolutionaries of the South. At the time of writing, the Nigerien authorities had not communicated an official account of the clashes, and the number of fatalities remains unverified.

Despite this attack, Nigerien authorities face internal divisions on dealing with the Revolutionaries of the South, the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Libya and the LAAF, with some officials closely aligned with the GNU and others more supportive of the LAAF. In June, Nigerien prime minister Ali Lamine Zeine – seen as pro-GNU – led a delegation to Tripoli to sign a memorandum of understanding on military cooperation with deputy defence minister Abd al-Sallam al-Zoubi.[35] During this visit, informal talks also reportedly led to an agreement for Nigerien authorities to free Bahar Al-Din Al-Sharidi, a Libyan who had opposed the LAAF in early 2025 during the restructuring of the 128th Brigade and subsequently fled to Niger, where he was captured and detained in July 2025.[36] The LAAF had reportedly requested the extradition of Al-Sharidi, but the Nigerien authorities had refused. His release on 22 June is a sign of strong ties between some members of the CNSP and the

GNU.[37] In response to this and in retaliation towards the Nigerien authorities, the LAAF released FPL founder Mahmoud Salah the same day.[38]

At the same time, some members of the CNSP are perceived as enjoying stronger ties with the LAAF – notably armed forces chief of staff General Mamane Sani Kiaou and Minister of Interior General Mohamed Toumba. These ties may have prompted the June operation launched by the Nigerien military against the Revolutionaries of the South. Some contacts believe the Nigerien military obtained LAAF support to target the Revolutionaries of the South in northern Niger. Other reports claim the LAAF has allied with the UNVP to target the Revolutionaries of the South. In May, a delegation representing the UNVP travelled to Benghazi via Toummo to meet the LAAF. The talks reportedly involved negotiations to provide the group with financial and military support. The Revolutionaries of the South issued a statement on 25 May accusing the UNVP representative of being involved in cocaine trafficking and denouncing the group's willingness to be 'mercenaries' for the LAAF.[39]



KEY TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN SMUGGLING

Human smuggling through Niger involves mostly northbound movements connecting key departure hubs such as Tahoua and Agadez to Algeria and Libya respectively. Both routes have seen increasing footfall since the 2015 ban on human smuggling was repealed in November 2023.[40] However, movements to Algeria have followed a broader upward trend since 2019, linked to a growing preference among foreign migrants for what is seen as a safer transit hub. By the start of 2025, the human smuggling industry had adapted to the new legislative framework, shifting activities back to formal routes and taking advantage of the lifting of restrictions to develop more efficient ways of moving migrants through Niger, particularly on routes to Libya.

However, two key changes reshaped these dynamics during the reporting period. First, Niger's legislative architecture for migration was recast: Ordinance 2025–02 replaces the repealed Law 2015–36 with a sovereignty-framed, unevenly enforced instrument whose main effect to date has been higher bribes rather than reduced movement. Second, rising violence – the conflict in southern Libya above all, but also armed banditry and rebel activity in northern Niger – has disrupted established routes and forced *passeurs* to adapt.

Legislative changes affect movement of foreign migrants

A key development influencing human smuggling in Niger was the introduction of Ordinance 2025–02 of 13 January 2025 on the entry and stay of foreigners, which marked a deliberate recalibration of migration management. The text makes entry and stay conditional on the possession of valid travel or residence documents, makes a residence permit or resident card mandatory after three months, and provides for penal and administrative sanctions, including two to five years' imprisonment and fines of FCFA5–50 million (€7 600–€76 000) for foreigners who refuse to comply.[41] It criminalizes the direct and indirect facilitation of irregular entry, movement or stay, with the same penalties, as well as the confiscation of vehicles used, and obliges anyone hosting a foreign national to declare them to the police.[42] Foreign nationals in Niger in irregular situations were given six months to regularize their status.

On paper, the instrument is similar to Law 2015–36, which had criminalized human smuggling. Both built a comprehensive legal architecture of documents, offences, penalties and removals around the movement of foreigners across Nigerien territory. However, the enforcement of the ordinance contrasts significantly with that of Law 2015–36. While the November 2023 repeal of Law 2015–36 was followed almost immediately by an open resurgence of smuggling activity, the introduction of the ordinance has not been matched by a comparable reversal because its enforcement has been selective.

The ordinance's stated purpose is protection against 'infiltration and destabilization', in direct continuity with Tiani's 25 December 2024 televised accusations that France was preparing destabilization operations from neighbouring countries.[43] Unlike Law 2015–36, the ordinance is not framed as a migration management tool to be used on behalf of external partners. This was an explicit grievance against Law 2015–36 and the reason it became politically toxic.[44] Instead, the ordinance criminalizes irregular foreign presence in the name of Niger's own security. As such, it can be considered the sovereign mirror image of Law 2015–36.

Despite its emphasis on sovereignty, the implementation of Ordinance 2025–02 has been uneven and in places contradictory, and enforcement is primarily focused in Agadez. The transport of foreign migrants holding documents continues openly, and human smuggling economies have not been recriminalized. The facilitation provisions of the ordinance appear to have been applied sparingly, though no prosecution statistics are publicly available to confirm the rate of enforcement.

The 'hosting' provisions included in the ordinance have also been applied to a minimal extent in the so-called 'ghettos' of Agadez. A large-scale enforcement operation took place in the city in February 2025, presented as a measure to seize contraband and improve security. It lasted several days, and around 600 foreign nationals were reportedly checked for valid documentation, according to Agadez municipal council. Those with valid travel documents were immediately released, while those without were taken to Agadez police station, where some alleged they paid to be released.

This was the only large-scale enforcement operation linked to the ordinance observed during the reporting period. One reason for the lack of enforcement is the lack of funding attached to the ordinance, meaning it has little prospect of being enforced at scale.

This is not to say the ordinance has had no noticeable effects. According to contacts and interviews with *passeurs* and migrants, it resulted in more documentary checks at entry points, bus stations and checkpoints, allegedly leading to an uptick in the number of bribes paid by migrants lacking documentation. Interviewed migrants alleged that bribes tended to be FCFA1 000–FCFA10 000 (€1.50–€15) per person at each checkpoint, depending on which documents they possessed. Alleged bribes of up to FCFA50 000 (€76) were also reported.

Passeurs interviewed at the end of 2025 also discussed the impact of the ordinance, noting that the number of foreign migrants travelling through Niger had fallen considerably, changing the profit margins of human smuggling. Though the number of people from most West African states transiting Niger fell, the number of Nigerians, particularly those from Hausa communities, remained relatively high, with some *passeurs* noting that Hausa Nigerians could be passed off as Nigeriens.

While Ordinance 2025–02 has had a mixed impact on migrant movement, there is a risk that heightened enforcement will push smugglers to revert to clandestine operations along dangerous desert routes, as Law 2015–36 did.[45] However, there is little indication of any significant political will to more fully enforce the legislation, suggesting its impact on overall human smuggling levels and trends will remain muted.

Instability affects human smuggling

The other major dynamic affecting human smuggling in Niger during the reporting period was linked to rising insecurity in southern Libya. This emerged in February 2025 with fighting in the southern Libyan city of Qatrun between the LAAF and Chadian mercenaries. As a result of the clashes and the resulting crackdown, *passeurs* travelling between Niger and Libya were forced to halt their operations. When news of the violence broke, all departures from Niger were immediately suspended.

> *The [LAAF] military police and the 87th [Rapid Intervention Battalion] are still in Qatrun, I can't take the risk of going there with passengers. Moreover, the forces benefit from the complicity of locals who identify people and where they live. Because of this everyone is afraid and no one takes any risks.*

INTERVIEW WITH A *PASSEUR*, FEBRUARY 2025

> *It has really blocked us, there is neither exit nor entry, it's really difficult. The conflict flared up between the Libyan military. If they catch you with passengers, they take you to jail directly and seize your vehicle. [Since the beginning of the conflict] we have not organized a trip. We are waiting for peace to resume. If your vehicle is not in good condition, you risk dying in the desert. Everyone is waiting for the return of peace to organize trips. But there are a few Tebu who are leaving, little by little.*

INTERVIEW WITH A *PASSEUR*, FEBRUARY 2025

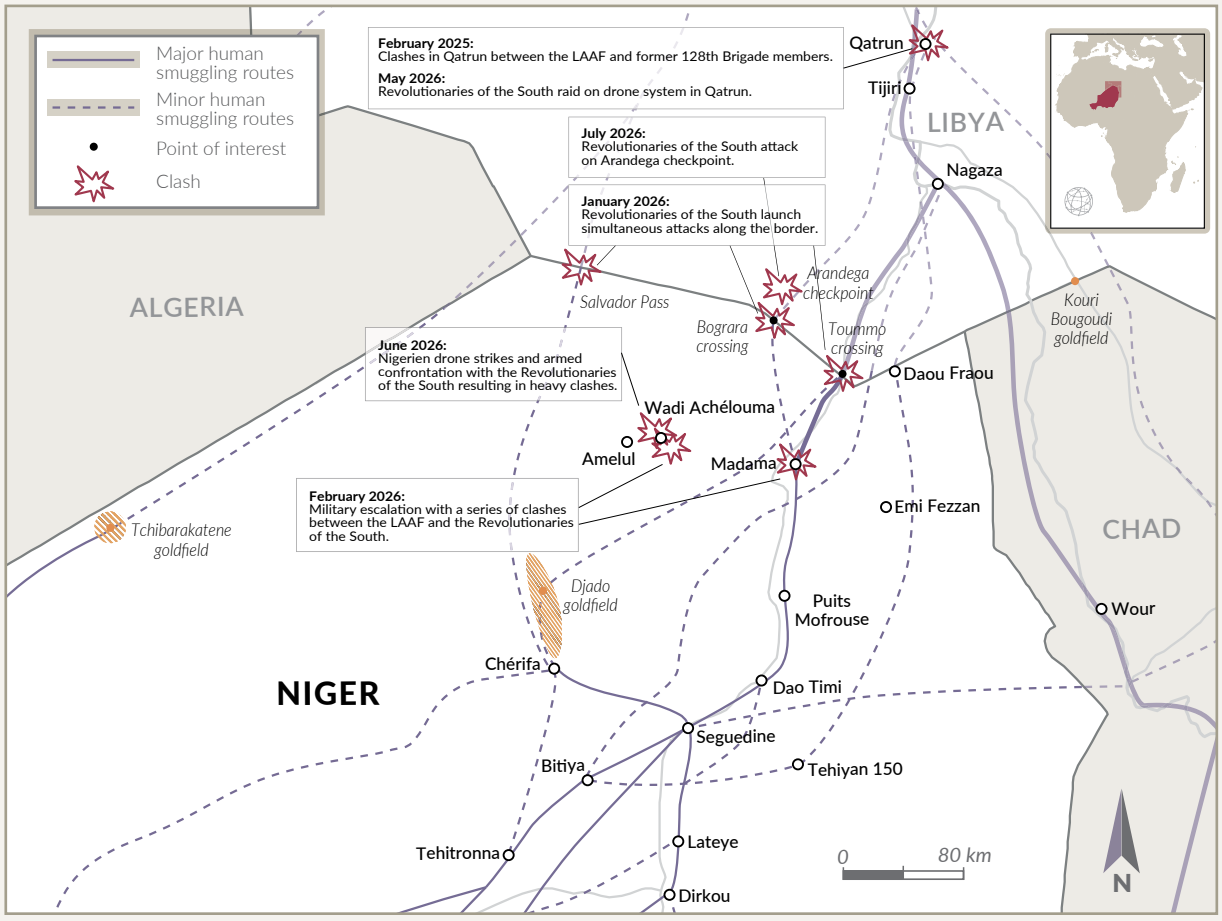


FIGURE 1 Human smuggling routes and conflict at the Niger–Libya border, January 2025 to June 2026.

Those who had left Agadez before the outbreak of violence but had not yet arrived in Qatrun or Sebha could not continue to Libya. *Passeurs* carrying passengers were forced to stop in Madama (about 100 kilometres south of the border), Seguedine (300 kilometres south of the border) or Lateye (85 kilometres south of Seguedine). According to several *passeurs*, more than 500 *passeurs* and passengers were stranded by mid-February.

Some *passeurs* decided to wait until the situation in Qatrun had eased, while others continued without their passengers or returned to Agadez. These decisions largely depended on payment arrangements. Many migrants travel on credit, paying *passeurs* upon arrival at an agreed location in Libya. *Passeurs* transporting migrants on credit were therefore more likely to wait with their passengers for the situation to improve. Some of the *passeurs* who were paid in advance, however, reportedly abandoned their passengers, refusing to transport them further or take them back to Agadez. According to local contacts, some charged migrants FCFA30 000 (€46) for transport back to Agadez. Passengers who could not afford this amount were left stranded for several weeks.

The disruption caused by the Qatrun fighting, however, proved to be only partial. By late February, some *passeurs* had organized a few departures into Libya. Some reported using a new arrival point at Tijiri, a small locality 60 kilometres south of Qatrun and 190 kilometres north of the Nigerien border. Others reported using bypass routes to enter northern Chad from Madama, circumventing Qatrun, then travelling to Sebha. A *passeur* interviewed in Agadez in March 2025 noted: 'Now they enter [Libya] clandestinely, far from Qatrun. We take the road to Chad and then to Sebha. It's a new road.'

Nonetheless, the broader trend was a generalized decline in movement from northern Niger to southern Libya. Departures from Agadez ranged from 20–50 vehicles per week in March 2025 to 40–50 in January 2026. By comparison, in January 2025, before the fighting in Qatrun, an average of 80–90 vehicles departed Agadez for Libya per week, carrying 1 600–1 700 migrants.

The price of the Agadez–Libya route increased because of the disruption, from FCFA100 000– FCFA120 000 (€152–€183) to FCFA140 000 (€213) for foreign migrants and from FCFA60 000 to FCFA120 000 (€91–€183) for Nigeriens. Some *passeurs* using the route through northern Chad quoted prices as high as FCFA300 000 (€457) for foreign migrants, equivalent to the cost before the repeal of the anti-smuggling law.

Suppressed movement and higher prices throughout 2025 were largely due to persistent LAAF security measures targeting migrants and *passeurs* in southern Libya. Intensified surveillance and border patrols meant routes continually changed. In March, *passeurs* reported bypassing Toummo either by paying bribes to cross the border at Bograra or by moving into Chad and passing through Wour. However, towards the end of the year more *passeurs* were reported to have been using the Salvador Pass as a crossing point.



View from a vehicle belonging to a *passeur* travelling through the Salvador Pass, a dangerous route near the Algeria–Niger–Libya triborder area, April 2026. *Photo: GI-TOC*

The emergence of the Revolutionaries of the South and renewed conflict at the Libyan border in January 2026 further disrupted human smuggling between Niger and Libya. The main routes through or near Toummo and Bograra were closed, and the LAAF again stepped up surveillance and patrols in Libyan territory. In addition to risks of interception by the LAAF, *passeurs* operating in the area also risked being caught in the crossfire of armed confrontation between the LAAF and the Revolutionaries of the South.

> *It [the conflict] had a big impact on our business, really. Armed people are fighting each other, [so] how can you position yourself in the centre? There is no back and forth during the period of conflict.*
>
> INTERVIEW WITH A *PASSEUR* IN AGADEZ, MARCH 2026



Passengers in Agadez prepare for departure to Libya, May 2026. *Photo: GI-TOC*

While transport of Nigeriens continued, albeit in lower numbers than before the disruption, transport of foreigners mostly halted. As a result, *passeurs* reported that many foreign migrants who had travelled to Agadez in late 2025 and January 2026 were left stranded, with one contact estimating several hundred migrants present in Agadez in March. Foreign migrants – mostly Nigerians – who used the Kouri Kantana route connecting the Nigerian border to Libya through an exchange point 120 kilometres east of Agadez were also stranded.

Interviews with *passeurs* in March 2026 indicated that their activities had been severely affected. While some had stopped operating, others found ways to maintain limited movements to Libya, mostly involving Nigerien migrants. According to *passeurs*, Nigeriens were prepared to use longer, more dangerous routes, while foreigners were more risk averse. One of the *passeurs* explained: 'There are no passengers like before with the closure of the border. The Nigeriens we smuggle are more resilient than foreign migrants.'

Passeurs increasingly used bypass routes to circumvent Libya's main entry points and areas targeted by LAAF patrols. Only three possibilities were available:

- The Salvador Pass, a particularly risky route typically used by high-level traffickers transporting drugs and arms. It requires knowledge of the desert and sturdy vehicles. It is also risky due to the presence of armed groups of bandits. Migrants using this route are usually Nigeriens, with small numbers of Nigerians, Chadians, Burkinabé, Malians, Sudanese and Ghanaians.
- An exchange system in which passengers were transported to Madama and then collected by Libyan *passeurs* with better security force contacts and knowledge of bypass routes in Libya.
- From Seguedine, entering Chad via Wour and then moving north into Libya through Kouri Bougoudi.

In March 2026, for example, an estimated 15–20 vehicles departed from Agadez each week to Libya via the Salvador Pass, transporting 300–400 passengers in total. Estimates for the two other alternative routes were unavailable, though contacts reported few *passeurs* using them. Overall,

the number of departures from Agadez to Libya in March was drastically lower than the 40–50 vehicles a week in January. Bypass methods all involved higher risks and costs for *passeurs*, increasing the price of travel from about FCFA75 000 (€114) to up to FCFA120 000 (€183) for Nigeriens. Prices for foreign nationals rose from FCFA100 000–FCFA120 000 (€152–€183) to FCFA150 000–FCFA200 000 (€229–€305), and even as high as FCFA250 000 (€381).

Since April, intensified LAAF military operations have severely impeded the use of routes through the Salvador Pass. Several LAAF units were deployed to conduct patrols along routes connecting the pass to Ubari, Qatrun, and other passage points such as Bograra and Toummo. These operations targeted not only the Revolutionaries of the South but any clandestine movement, such as human smuggling and fuel smuggling. From April, the LAAF reportedly intercepted migrant convoys on five occasions, involving about 15 vehicles. On 22 May, a *passeur* was killed while attempting to flee during an LAAF interception near the pass. A second *passeur* was reportedly killed in a separate incident. As a result, local contacts reported that almost all movements had been halted.

> *All roads are controlled at the Libyan border. The journey is long, fuel is expensive, there is a risk of arrest. For example, you know 90 per cent that you're going to be intercepted, you take passengers on credit, you finance your trip, and if you are stopped on the road? Who loses? It's you, of course. Your vehicle is seized, you are arrested and you lose your passengers without money. You have to be crazy to keep working.*

INTERVIEW WITH A *PASSEUR* IN AGADEZ, MAY 2026

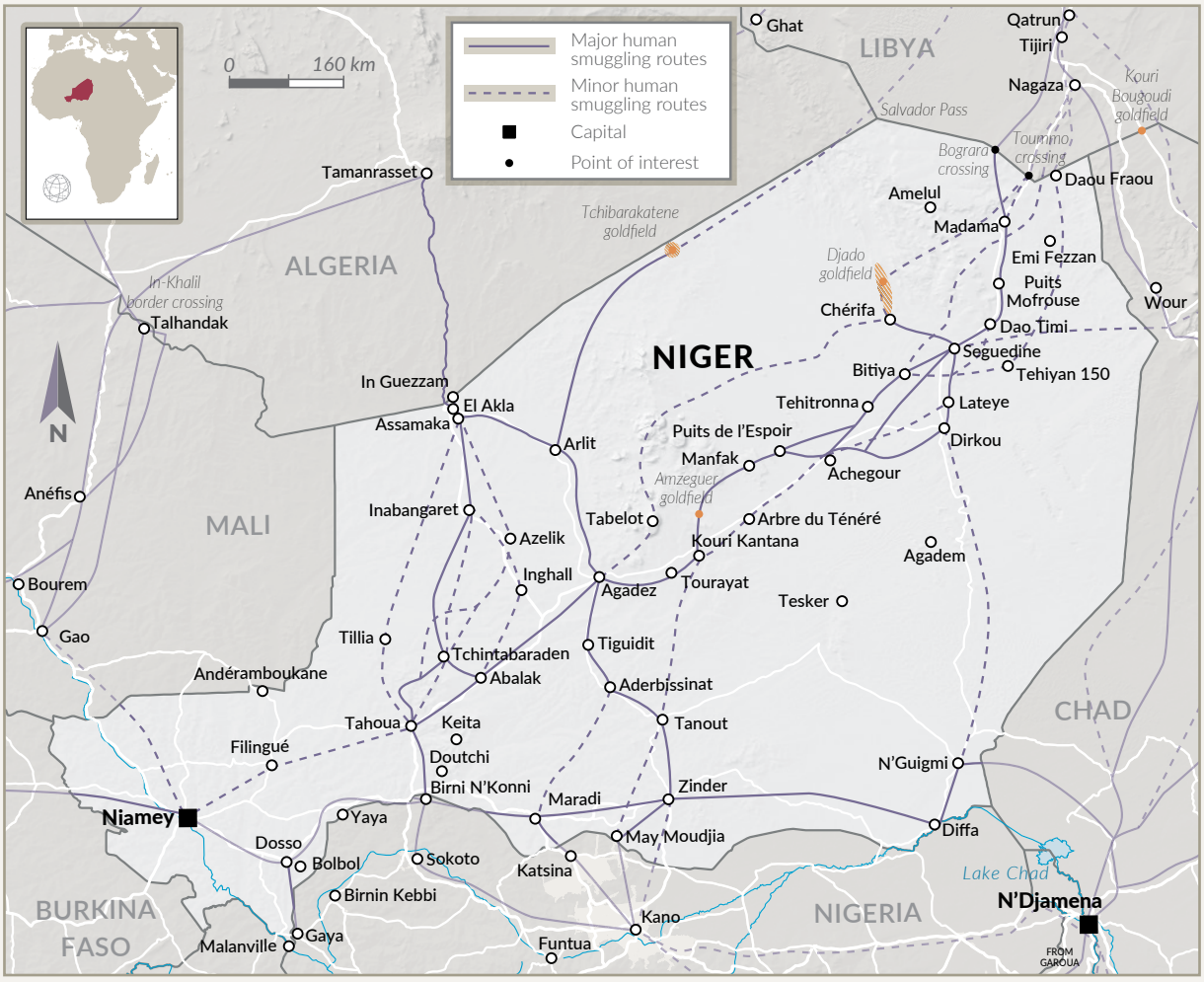


FIGURE 2 Main human smuggling routes through Niger.



Vehicle belonging to a *passeur* killed during an operation by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces near the Salvador Pass in May 2026 *Photo: GI-TOC*

As a result, by mid-2026 the number of departures from Agadez had further decreased to three or four a week, transporting 60–90 passengers in total, of whom an estimated 70 per cent were Nigerien.

In the first and second quarters of 2026, human smuggling activities through Kouri Kantana were also affected, as they use the same entry points to Libya as routes from Agadez. In June 2026, the number of people travelling to Libya via Kouri Kantana was estimated at 75–100, involving three to four departures. In January 2026, by comparison, 200–300 people were travelling.

Disruptions in movement to Libya have driven an increase in departures to Algeria, typically taking place in Tahoua, and to a lesser extent Agadez and Arlit. In Tahoua, *passeurs* have reported a significant increase in the number of foreign migrants travelling to Algeria since the beginning of the year. According to *passeurs* and *coxeurs* (intermediaries who connect migrants with smugglers) in the departure hub, 800–1 000 foreign migrants travelled to Algeria each week in July 2026, notably more than the weekly figure of 400–600 in 2025.

Nonetheless, the impact of instability on the Algeria route fluctuated in the reporting period. In early 2025, for example, movement from Tahoua was relatively low, between 100 and 200 per week, having fallen from a high in 2024. The low numbers might also have been influenced by the impact of Ordinance 2025–02.

> *Between February and April, we started to organize departures little by little every week, even if at the beginning of the year the situation was less progressive for our work. Then, from May 2025 to today, the situation has really changed. There are 20 or more departures each week.*

INTERVIEW WITH A *PASSEUR* IN TAHOUA, JULY 2025

By early 2026, however, the effects of the challenges on routes to Libya started to be felt in Tahoua, where *passeurs* registered growing demand for travel among foreign migrants. The shift also affected prices, with the cost of travel dropping from FCFA80 000–FCFA100 000 (€122–€152) in 2025 to FCFA70 000–FCFA80 000 (€107–€122) in 2026. The number of people travelling from Arlit to Algeria also grew, doubling from an estimated 210–280 per week in 2025 to up to 560 in July 2026.

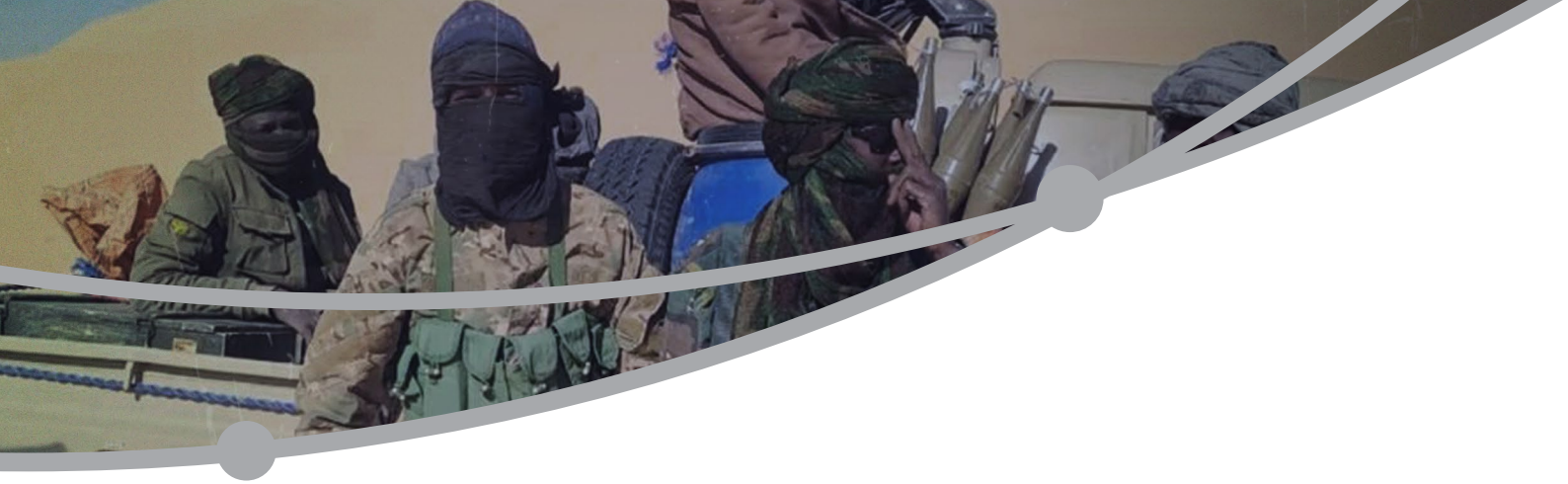
Another key change is the development of a new route connecting Agadez to Algeria without transiting Arlit. This route travels north-west of Agadez via the village of Tiguefan in the Inghall commune. According to *passeurs* operating on this route, about 250 migrants are transported to Algeria each week. A *passeurs* interviewed in July 2026 noted: 'Every day, there are at least two vehicles that leave discreetly for Algeria via our new road. There is no control on this road fortunately. But the police haven't been too interested in our activities for some time.'

In addition to a shift in smuggling activity towards Tahoua and Algeria, the growing disruptions in northern Niger have forced several *passeurs* to cease departures to Libya and find other ways of making a living. Offering transport to Nigerien goldfields such as Djado or Tchibarakatene is a popular alternative, alongside other forms of smuggling. Demand for transport to goldfields has remained stable, involving Nigerien, Chadian and Sudanese passengers. The number of Sudanese refugees moving through the Sahel and to and from Nigerien goldfields has risen in the past two years. Gold mining is attractive for young Sudanese men in search of livelihoods, building on well-established Sudanese gold-mining communities throughout the Sahel.

Rising conflict has also generated opportunities for fuel smuggling, since it halted the movement of Libyan fuel into Niger and led to a significant price increase. The cost of 60 litres of fuel (petrol) rose from FCFA30 000 (€46) to FCFA40 000 (€61) (from €0.76 to €1.01 per litre) in Agadez and reached FCFA65 000 (€99) (€1.65 per litre) in Dirkou and Seguedine during the reporting period. On the goldfields, the price of fuel soared due to its use in operating equipment and generators, as well as the need for journeys between gold sites and the nearby towns that supply them. In Djado and Tchibarakatene, the price of a litre of fuel reached FCFA3 000 (€4.60) during the reporting period. Since the price at an officially regulated pump is about FCFA540 (€0.80), the incentive for smuggling is high.



Smugglers transporting cigarettes from Libya to Niger stop for a break near Tehiyan 150, a waypoint on a remote route connecting Niger and Libya, June 2026. *Photo: GI-TOC*



CONCLUSION

The situation in southern Libya was the most significant factor affecting human smuggling through Niger during the reporting period, and is likely to continue shaping mobility in coming months. This has demonstrated the dependence of the smuggling industry in Niger on stability not only within the country but also further downstream. If the conflict subsides, departures to Libya could gradually resume, though anti-smuggling operations in southern Libya would still be a key challenge. If the instability persists or escalates, however, the dynamics seen over the reporting period will consolidate. The rerouting of movements to Algeria is likely to continue driving demand in key departure hubs such as Tahoua and increase the number of migrants at risk of expulsion in Algeria.

The blockade on the Libya route will also continue to push *passeurs* towards alternative activities such as transport to goldfields, fuel smuggling and drug trafficking. The involvement of *passeurs* in other activities is relevant to local dynamics as it is likely not only to strengthen their dependence on illicit economies – some of which have higher risks than human smuggling – and push them further from formal livelihoods, but also to further drive these illicit economies in the area. *Passeurs* who remain active in the transport of migrants to Libya are likely to rely on circuitous bypass routes, with significant risks for drivers and passengers. The repeal of the 2015–36 law largely reduced the risk of breakdowns and accidents on remote desert routes, as it allowed *passeurs* to return to main roads. The current situation has pushed movements back to more dangerous itineraries, including those using the Salvador Pass that intersect with drug trafficking routes and areas targeted by armed bandits.

By August 2026, these risks were further aggravated by the renewal of armed conflict between the LAAF and the Revolutionaries of the South, an attack by the MPLJ in Seguedine, and the remobilization – with the support of the LAAF – of the FPL based in Libya. This increasingly dense overlap of Nigerien, Chadian and Libyan rebel groups, active in the far north-east of the country and cross-border areas, has also raised tensions between Niamey, Tripoli, Benghazi and N'Djamena. This adds another layer of uncertainty to mobility dynamics between the three countries, as well as additional risks linked to growing insecurity.

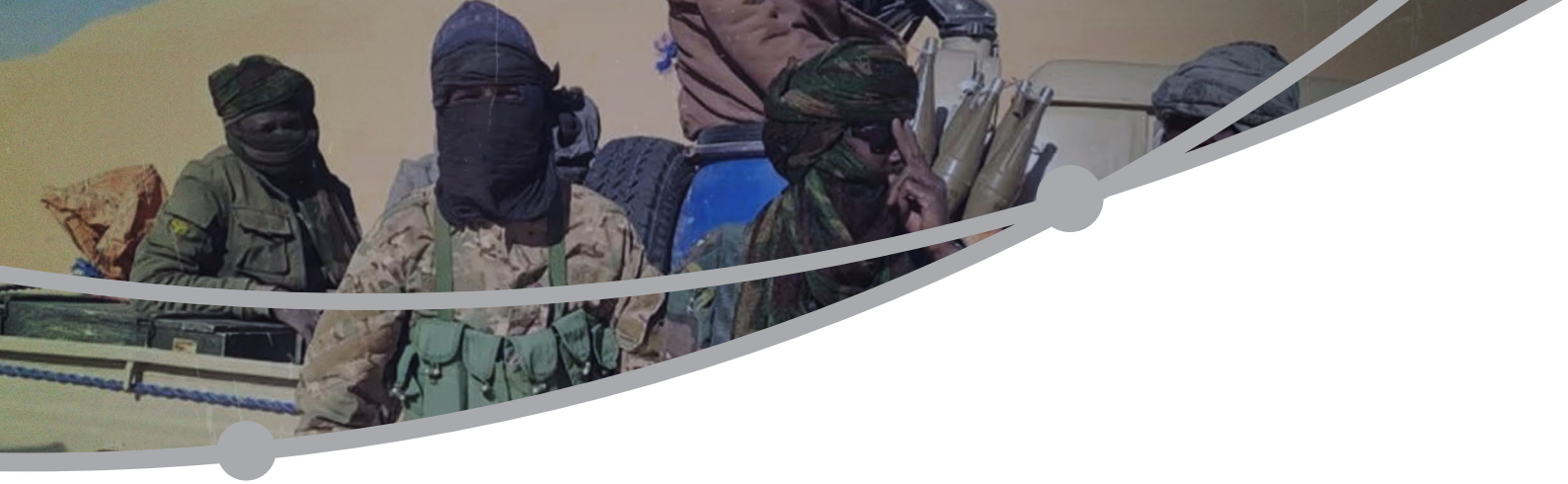
Another key issue to watch is the long-awaited reopening of the Benin border. If it takes place, despite the strict conditions imposed by Niamey, it would be the most significant development in human smuggling since the repeal of Law 2015–36 in November 2023. It would allow the full resumption of direct commercial bus routes connecting West Africa to Niamey, without the need for lengthy, costly and risky clandestine pirogue crossings to enter Niger from Benin. This would sharply increase the

number of people arriving in Niger seeking onward travel to Algeria and Libya. If the challenges on the Libya route persist, the Algeria route will receive most of this surge in demand.

However, movements to Algeria may also be affected by the strengthened cooperation between Niger and Algeria. If the warming of relations and engagement on areas of mutual interest continues, Niamey may feel pressure to address the surge in irregular movements to Algeria, which could result in measures to limit human smuggling.

Therefore, Niger's relationships with four neighbours – Libya, Chad, Algeria and Benin – and the political and security dynamics underpinning them will be key to determining the trajectory of human smuggling in 2027.

What has changed since the reporting period closed is that regime stability itself can no longer be treated as a constant in this equation. The August 2026 mutiny at Air Base 101 – contained only with direct support from Russia's Africa Corps, whose Niamey headquarters are located at the base – exposed fractures in the security apparatus that the CNSP depends on to manage its borders. A junta absorbed by its own cohesion is less able to sustain the convoy-and-escort systems, checkpoint economies and diplomatic balancing acts described in this brief. The improved relationship with Algeria has already produced a first result – drilling began at Kafra in August 2026 – while the Benin border remained physically closed as of September. Both tracks, and the Libyan conflict, will therefore be read differently depending on whether the CNSP emerges from the August mutiny strengthened or weakened.



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