

Mixed Migration in West Africa

Data, Routes and Vulnerabilities
of People on the move

Extended Summary

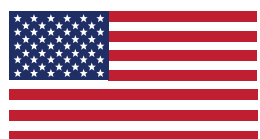


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Introduction

The present text is an extended summary of a report produced by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat West Africa. The report examines mixed migration within, from and to West Africa and aims to gather available knowledge concerning people moving in mixed flows with the principal aim of identifying vulnerable groups and assessing their specific protection needs.¹

The report focuses specifically on mixed migration, a concept that emerged in the 1990s as a recognition that the existing protection regimes, founded on the basic distinction between refugees as defined by the refugee convention, and others, often summarily categorized as migrants, are inadequate to guarantee the protection of the rights of many people on the move in diverse contexts.² Mixed migration thus reflects the realization that many people on the move, be they people fleeing violence or persecution, victims of trafficking, children or others, and regardless of the reasons compelling them to move, are vulnerable.

The current report begins by identifying and assessing the available data on mixed migration before developing an overview of the general regional migration context in West Africa, focusing on specific routes and the factors that influence the conditions of movement. It argues that these factors expose people on the move to specific risks, exploiting existing and creating new vulnerabilities. The report then identifies certain vulnerable groups of people on the move and classifies them according to their specific vulnerabilities, with attention to the important overlap between the identified categories.

The identification of certain groups and their vulnerabilities aims to serve as a basis for identifying current gaps in the protection of people in mixed migration movements within and from West Africa, and to inform more effective protection-based programming in the wider region.

The report closes by identifying knowledge gaps and outlining the potential areas for further research to improve the capacity of relevant stakeholders to develop relevant protection frameworks for people on the move, in and beyond the region.

¹ For the purpose of the report, West Africa comprises all Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries, with the addition of Mauritania.

² Ogata, Sadako. 1995. Mixed Migration: Strategy for Refugees and Economic Migrants. *Harvard International Review* 17 (2): 30–33.

A note on available data

One of the main challenges in attempting to capture mixed migration patterns from, to, and within West Africa is the paucity and uncertain quality of statistical data.³ If statistical charts provide an easy sense of scientific robustness, in the regional and thematic context they might be misleading and should thus be viewed as orders of magnitude rather than presenting accurate figures.

Within West Africa, most available demographic data on migration derives from national censuses. These censuses use various definitions,⁴ which make them difficult to compare,⁵ are conducted at different time intervals and not synchronized across countries.⁶ Due to the uneven and distant time intervals and the fact that they mainly focus on migrants stocks,⁷ it is also not possible to precisely capture migrant flows. While researchers and institutions have attempted to come up with better pictures by triangulating available data and by using different means of extrapolation, such composite data should be taken with caution regarding precise figures.⁸

By far the biggest gap in available data concerns the measuring of what is commonly referred to as “irregular migration”, most commonly associated with the concept of mixed migration. Data collection on irregular migration is largely dependent on law enforcement policies and practices, as increasing controls at borders or within countries entails more identification.⁹ In West Africa, many States lack administrative capacities to implement effective border enforcement policies. Further, as administrative practices at borders can put irregular migrants at risks of extortion, detention or deportation, they tend to avoid contact with authorities.¹⁰ In addition, land border crossings in West Africa often go undetected because borders are remote and too vast to be efficiently monitored.¹¹ They also often separate communities from the same ethno-cultural stock, leading to a permissive approach to border management by relevant authorities.

3 Bakewell, Oliver, and Hein De Haas. 2007. African Migrations: continuities, discontinuities and recent transformations. In *African alternatives*, 95–118. Brill. Available at <<http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/10.1163/ej.9789004161139.i-185.38/>>. Accessed 9 March 2017; Flahaux, Marie-Laurence, and Hein de Haas. 2016. African migration: trends, patterns, drivers. *Comparative Migration Studies* 4 (1): 1

4 For example, migrants can be defined according to citizenship, or according to country of birth, thus resulting in barely comparable figures, as they include or exclude naturalized citizens.

5 IOM, and ICMPD. 2015. A survey on migration policies in West Africa. International Center for Migration Policy Development. Available at <https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/ICMPD-Website/ICMPD_General/Publications/2015/A_Survey_on_Migration_Policies_in_West_Africa_EN_SOFT.pdf>. Accessed 7 March 2017.

6 IOM. 2008a. Enhancing Data on Migration in West and Central Africa. Geneva: IOM. Available at <http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/enhancing_data_africa.pdf>. Accessed 16 March 2017; Flahaux and de Haas 2016; IOM and ICMPD 2015.

7 Robin, Nelly. 2014. Migrations, observatoire et droit. Complexité du système migratoire ouest- africain. Migrants et normes juridiques. Université de Poitiers.

8 Beauchemin, Cris. 2011. Rural–urban migration in West Africa: towards a reversal? Migration trends and economic situation in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. *Population, Space and Place* 17 (1): 47–72

9 De Haas, Hein. 2008. Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union: An overview of recent trends. Vol. 32. International Organization for Migration Geneva. Available at <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/14f2/ff491b6e9e0f66ad69ab58444bf3330708.pdf>>. Accessed 8 March 2017.

10 De Genova, Nicholas P. 2002. Migrant “Illegality” and Deportability in Everyday Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (1): 419–447.

11 Bakewell and De Haas 2007.

Historical context to movements within and from West Africa

West Africa displays migration patterns characterized by intense internal mobility, with extra-regional movements dominated by mobility towards North Africa and Europe. By convention, West Africa comprises 16 countries, with a total population of over 355 million in 2016, and a strong spatial division between the forested areas in the South, and the Sahelian desert belt. Since the 1950s, the region has experienced fast demographic growth, with the population almost quadrupling, and sprawling urbanization, with a factor 10 growth in urban residents over the same period. Furthermore, the region has experienced various large-scale displacement crises due to conflict and environmental degradation.

By all accounts, Africa has the most mobile population worldwide, with West Africa being the sub-region with the highest rate of migration on the continent.¹² According to the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), the number of West Africans who had settled in another country between 1960 and 1990 amounted to 30 million.¹³ Most movement occurs within the region, with estimates putting intra-regional migration at 70 to 83% of all West African migration.¹⁴ Migration patterns within the region have displayed a certain historical continuity of colonial mobility patterns, with people moving from hinterlands and the Sahel toward coastal territories.¹⁵ Since the late 1980s three migration sub-systems have developed tied to economic dynamics: migration towards Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire (commercial crops and mines), towards Senegal (trading networks and agriculture), and towards Nigeria (oil and industries).¹⁶ The agrarian conflicts and following civil war which took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Côte d'Ivoire had a deep impact on mobility across West Africa, as Côte d'Ivoire had been at the epicentre of regional migration dynamics since the colonial period.¹⁷ However, since then, caught between ongoing political instability and intermittent armed conflicts, Côte d'Ivoire has attracted mainly migrants from neighbouring countries.

Regional mobility has also been the object of a formal political process in the context of ECOWAS. The 1979 ECOWAS Protocol in relation to the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment has set the stage for the progressive legal establishment of the free movement of citizens within the region. Article 59 of the treaty states that "citizens of the community shall have the right of entry, residence and establishment and Member States undertake to recognize these rights of Community citizens in their territories in accordance with the provisions of the Protocols relating hereto".¹⁸ Although the 1979 Protocol provided for a transition period of 15 years to achieve these three objectives, and was subsequently complemented by four additional protocols addressing free movement, the rights of residence and rights of establishment,¹⁹ to date only the first phase relating to the free movement of persons has been fully implemented by all ECOWAS countries. Thus citizens of ECOWAS states in possession of valid travel documents and health certificates can enter any ECOWAS member state visa free for up to 90 days. Despite the delayed and uneven implementation of the 1979 Protocol, it does endorse a positive perception of mobility in the region and has set a political trajectory.

12 Lombard, Jérôme. 2012. *Stratégies territoriales des États, mobilités individuelles et espaces transnationaux en Afrique de l'Ouest. L'État, acteur du développement*, Paris, Karthala: 227–242.

13 OECD/SWAC. 2006. *Atlas de l'intégration régionale en Afrique de l'Ouest*. OECD/SWAC. Available at <<https://www.oecd.org/fr/migrations/38410164.pdf>>. Accessed 27 March 2017.

14 Ndiaye, Mandiougou, and Nelly Robin. 2010. *Les migrations internationales en Afrique de l'Ouest: Une dynamique de régionalisation articulée à la mondialisation*. University of Oxford, International Migration Institute, IMI Working Paper (23).

15 Robin 2014.

16 OECD/SWAC 2006; Ndiaye and Robin 2010.

17 Ndiaye and Robin 2010.

18 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Revised Treaty of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), 1993, art. 59.

19 Supplementary Protocol A/SP.1/7/85 on the Code of Conduct of the Implementation of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment, 1985 ; Supplementary Protocol A/SP.1/7/86 on the Second Phase (Right of Residence), 1986 ; Supplementary Protocol A/SP.1/6/89 amending and complementing the provision of Article 7 of the Protocol on Free Movement, Right of Residence and Establishment, 1989 ; Supplementary Protocol A/SP.2/5/90 on the Implementation of the Third Phase (Right to Establishment), 1990.

In terms of intra-continental migration, West Africa is most strongly connected to North Africa.²⁰ In recent history, a first wave of South-North migration took place after the oil booms of the 1970s, as the growing economies in Libya and Algeria were sustained by the influx of workers from their southern neighbours,²¹ many of them unsettled by the Sahelian droughts of the 1970s.²² In the 1990s, Libya in particular became an important destination country, as it proactively engaged in transnational recruitment with its West African neighbours.²³ These movements were largely irregular and seasonal, as people travelled between West and North Africa, crossing borders without any controls. Indeed, there is a “long history of facilitated movements of both people and goods in the region, with migrants, pilgrims, traders and slaves transported alongside goods such as fuel, money, cigarettes, narcotics and small arms”.²⁴ However, considering the significant number of migrants transiting between West and North Africa for work in the 1990s and early 2000s, very few made the journey across the Mediterranean to Europe, prevented in part by the policies of the Libyan government at the time.

However, in the 1990s, Italy and Spain introduced new visa policies, in conformity with the Schengen agreement, making it much harder for North Africans to migrate legally across the Mediterranean.²⁵ More impervious borders did not stop the movements of people. Rather, they served to irregularize migration between the Maghreb, West Africa and Southern Europe, triggering the development of alternative, more dangerous routes and the establishment of a migrant smuggling economy in West and North Africa.²⁶ Indeed, the tightening of visa policies in European embassies across the continent in the 1990s made these new alternative routes the only possible avenue for many Africans to reach Europe. The fall of the Gadhafi regime in 2011 in Libya and the resulting descent of the country into civil war led an increasing number of migrants from West Africa to seek to move on to Europe by crossing the Mediterranean. Thus migration routes across the Sahara came to connect West Africa with the perilous passage to Europe through the Mediterranean.²⁷ Sub-Saharan Africans followed the path opened by North African migrants to the point where they overtook them in terms of unauthorized crossings of the Mediterranean.²⁸ Consequently, North Africa has become both a destination and a transit area for migration towards Europe.²⁹

20 Bredeloup, Sylvie, and Olivier Pliez. 2011. The Libyan migration corridor. Available at <<http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/16213/EU-US%20Immigration%20Systems%202011%20-%2003.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>. Accessed 3 April 2017.

21 IOM. 2008b. Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union: An overview of recent trends. IOM Migration Research Series. IOM. Available at <http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs-32_en.pdf>. Accessed 5 April 2017. pp. 15.

22 Brachet, Julien, Armelle Choplin, and Olivier Pliez. 2011. Le Sahara entre espace de circulation et frontière migratoire de l'Europe. *Hérodote* (142): 163–182.

23 Bredeloup and Pliez 2011.

24 RMMS West Africa. 2017. Before the Desert. Conditions and risks on mixed migration routes through West Africa. Insights from the mixed migration monitoring mechanism initiative (4mi) in Mali and Niger. RMMS West Africa/DRC p. 14.

25 De Haas 2008, vol. 32, 32; Yıldız, Aysel Güzde. 2016. The European Union's Immigration Policy. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Available at <<http://link.springer.com/10.1057/978-1-137-58699-5>>. Accessed 6 April 2017.

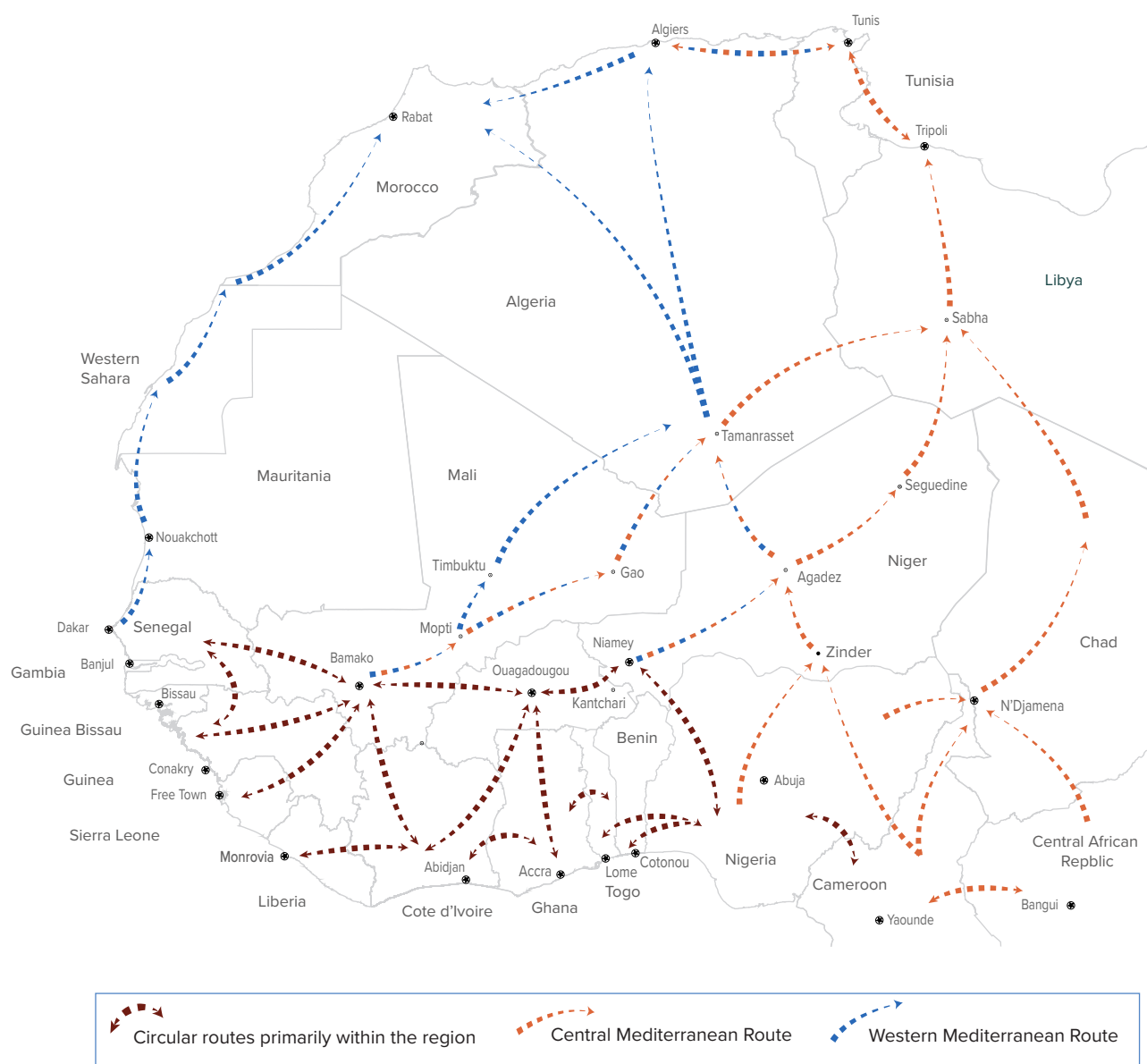
26 Adepaju, Aderanti, Alistair Boulton, and Mariah Levin. 2010. Promoting Integration Through Mobility: Free Movement Under Ecowas. *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 29 (3): 120–144; Carling, Jørgen. 2007. Migration Control and Migrant Fatalities at the Spanish-African Borders. *International Migration Review* 41 (2): 316–343.

27 IOM 2008b.

28 De Haas 2008, vol. 32, 16.

29 Marfaing, Laurence. 2008. Migration saisonnière, va-et-vient, migration internationale ? L'exemple des Sénégalais à Nouakchott. *Revue Asylon(s)* (3). Available at <article718.html>; de Wenden, Catherine Wihtol. 2011. Dynamiques migratoires sub-sahariennes vers l'Afrique du Nord. *Confluences Méditerranée* (74): 133–142; Brachet, Julien, Armelle Choplin, and Olivier Pliez. 2011. Le Sahara entre espace de circulation et frontière migratoire de l'Europe. *Hérodote* (142): 163–182; de Wenden, Catherine Wihtol. 2013. Migrations en Méditerranée, une nouvelle donne. *Confluences Méditerranée* 87 (4): 19.

Mixed Migration within and out of West Africa



Mixed migration occurs when different types of people enter the same migration routes as a result of a physical concentration of points of passage from one country to another. This can be the result of a lack of infrastructure, forcing people on the same roads or through the same railway stations, ports or airports. It can also be the outcome of restrictive migration control systems, which authorize passage through given points and restrict passage through others. Current migration control cooperation between Europe and countries such as Niger or Libya, combine these different effects (lack of infrastructure, restrictive migration policies and border control enforcement), thus concentrating people on the move on very few migration routes. Due to the free-movement protocols within West Africa, this is not so much the case within the region, and mixed migration routes thus mainly concern trans-regional and trans-continental migration.


In West Africa, migrants are free to arrange their journeys according to their available economic resources (opting for the air route, for instance) and specific goals. Legally speaking, any West African citizen can move to another ECOWAS country, with few administrative requirements. As a result, mixed migration flows are marginal, with some important exceptions. For instance, migrants from outside the region transiting irregularly across West Africa, West Africans moving


within the ECOWAS space without proper identity documents,³⁰ and victims of trafficking.³¹ Increasingly, even documented West Africans tend to fall into similar situations as unauthorized migrants before they even exit the ECOWAS space from north of Agadez in Niger due the increased enforcement operations against migrants in these areas carried out by the Nigerien government in close cooperation with the EU.³²

Indeed, the development of bilateral migration control agreements between the EU or individual European countries and African states, including ECOWAS members, and subsequent operations, have disrupted previous migration patterns to other regions of Africa, particularly to Morocco,³³ Algeria or Libya, which all come to be framed as potential journeys toward Europe.³⁴ Another type of mixed migration thus concerns the mixing on the Saharan trails, of voluntary migrants and refugees aiming at North Africa and others heading towards Europe. In Libya in particular, successive agreements between the country and Italy have led to a strong increase in arrests, detention and deportation of sub-Saharan migrants by Libyan authorities, often without regard for their legal situation.³⁵ Southern Libya has been declared a military zone and corresponding borders with Niger and Chad have been formally closed since 2012. In Morocco, the growing difficulty of crossing the European border has thus turned Morocco from a transit space on the way to Europe to a transit and a (forced) destination country for stranded migrants,³⁶ overwhelmingly from West African countries. Algeria has also closed and militarized all of its borders (except with Tunisia) since 2014.

The routes from West Africa to Europe

Even though the current conflation between labour migrants to North Africa and other migration flows to Europe is problematic, it remains that many West Africans, whether they are transiting or stranded in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, aim ultimately at crossing the Mediterranean.³⁷ There are currently two main routes from North Africa to Europe.

 The Western Mediterranean route, connecting Morocco to Spain through the Strait of Gibraltar and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The Western route has steadily represented between 2 to 8% of the total identified crossings,³⁸ with people almost equally crossing to Spain by land (through Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco) or by sea.³⁹

 The central (or Northern) Mediterranean route, linking Libya and, to a lesser extent, Egypt and Tunisia to Southern Italy. Over time, the central route through Libya has consistently captured the biggest share of sea crossings by West Africans.⁴⁰

The flexibility of smuggling agents and networks allows for fast redeployment of migration routes at different strategic points according to circumstances. As of 31 May 2017, migrant traffic through the Western route to Spain was mounting again.⁴¹ This might suggest a reorganization of the smuggling routes in reaction to the crackdown in Niger and the attempted closure of the Southern Libyan border.

30 An acute problem in West Africa, with UNICEF estimating that more than 40 million children under five years are unregistered across the region (see Nigerian Tribune 2017)

31 For instance, official labour migration to mining or agricultural regions and sites overlaps with incoming flows of child and sex workers. Likewise, sex trafficking flourishes around the coastal transportation axis between Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria.

32 Niger passed an anti-trafficking law in 2015, drafted with the assistance of UNODC. Through the EU-TF, the country has also received assistance in training its security forces for anti-smuggling operations. As a result, any African foreigner in Niger (including ECOWAS citizens) is at risk of being taken for an unauthorized migrant bound to North Africa or Europe by relevant law enforcement forces.

33 Walton-Roberts, Margaret, and Jenna Henneby, eds. 2014. *Territoriality and Migration in the E.U. Neighbourhood*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

34 Marfaing 2008; Brachet, Choplin, and Pliez 2011.

35 Adepoju, Boulton, and Levin 2010; Bredeloup and Pliez 2011; MHUB. 2015. *Detained youth: The fate of young migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Libya today*. MHUB. Accessed 11 April 2017.

36 Bakewell, Oliver. 2009. *South-South Migration and Human Development Reflections on African Experiences*. Human development research paper. UNDP, Lombard 2012, 237

37 IOM. 2017b. *Analysis: Flow monitoring surveys the human trafficking and other exploitative practices prevalence indication survey*. IOM. Available at <http://migration.iom.int/docs/Analysis_Flow_Monitoring_and_Human_Trafficking_Surveys_in_the_Mediterranean_and_Beyond_26_April_2017.pdf>. Accessed 2 June 2017 - (rounded figures).

38 Carrera, Sergio, Jean-Pierre Cassarino, Nora El Qadim, Mehdi Lahlou, and Leonhard Den Hertog. 2016. *EU-Morocco Cooperation on Readmission, Borders and Protection: A model to follow?* Available at <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2721658>. Accessed 7 April 2017.

39 UNHCR 2016 Spain arrivals dashboard - 2016 Available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53859>. Accessed June 4, 2017.

40 Carling 2007, 325.

41 UNHCR. 2017b. *Spain arrivals dashboard - May 2017*. UNHCR. Available at <<https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/58424>>. Accessed 26 July 2017.

Smuggling of persons

Restrictive regimes of trans-border mobility between West and North Africa have augmented the use of smuggling services and concentrated land migration on a few routes. This focalization tends to blend different types of people (migrants to North Africa or Europe, refugees, seasonal workers, etc.). The UN defines smuggling of persons as “(t)he procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”.⁴² Contrary to trafficking, smuggling does not require an element of exploitation, coercion, or violation of human rights. Smuggling consists of facilitating the illegal entry of a foreign person into a country, in exchange for financial or material benefit.

Within West Africa, smuggling of persons is rather rare, since movement within the region is free for ECOWAS citizens, thus reducing incentives for resorting to such services.⁴³ It thus appears to occur mainly on trans-regional or trans-continental migration routes. In the Sahara, the paucity of “technological infrastructures” (absence of communication networks, small cities, few roads),⁴⁴ a hostile environment and a desert crossed by un-asphalted, sandy tracks running between oases, require fine navigational competences. This also holds true for the capacity to deal with potential threats, such as the presence of criminal groups and armed actors as well as the prevarication practices of state officials. People on the move are therefore dependent on organized businesses to undertake the journey between Mali or Niger and North Africa, to navigate the desert and border enforcement regimes.⁴⁵

Smuggling creates value by lifting the many hurdles restricting movement (economic, geographic, legal, etc.). Smuggling activities thrive around border crossing points to Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco and, even more so, in the context of the Mediterranean crossing, owing to the harsh environmental and security conditions and lack or absence of law enforcement.⁴⁶ When migrants resort to organized smuggling services to cross a border, they risk losing much of the control over their trajectories. In many cases, the distinction between trafficking and smuggling then becomes difficult to establish.⁴⁷ Smuggling frequently involves periods of exploitation, including forced labour to “pay” for the next stage of migrants’ journeys.

Concerning the route from West Africa to the North, a growing body of evidence shows that the conflation of smuggling and trafficking seems to occur mainly in Libya,⁴⁸ facilitated by current chaotic political and security situation in the country.⁴⁹ In June 2017, IOM issued a note indicating the existence of “slave markets” in Libya, where sub-Saharan migrants were being sold.⁵⁰ Another documented practice, notably in Libya (but also in Sudan and Egypt), is the abduction of migrants to extort ransom from their relatives back home.⁵¹

The blurring of smuggling and trafficking displays gendered patterns. If women are less prone to forced labour and abduction, they are more susceptible to being forced into the sex trade,⁵² or of being sexually coerced to pay for the next segment of their trip.⁵³ They are also at risk of being trafficked for the purpose of domestic labour, sometimes in slave-like conditions.⁵⁴

42 Art. 3(a), UN Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000

43 RMMS West Africa 2017. *Before the Desert*.

44 Xiang, Biao, and Johan Lindquist. 2014. *Migration Infrastructure*. *International Migration Review* 48: S122–S148.

45 Plaut, Martin. 2017. *Europe's wall against African migrants is almost complete*. *The Conversation*.

46 UNODC. 2011. *The role of organized crime in the smuggling of migrants from West Africa to the European Union*. UNODC. Accessed 5 April 2017.

47 Carling, Jørgen, Anne T. Gallagher, and Christopher Horwood. 2015. *Beyond Definitions: Global migration and the smuggling-trafficking nexus*. *Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat*.

48 Floor, El Kamouni-Janssen. 2017. *'Only God can stop the smugglers'*. *Understanding human smuggling networks in Libya*. CRU Report. Clingendael.

49 Although an IOM DTM survey in Italy shows that forced labour also occurs in Niger, IOM claims that, according to its own definition, 91% of all trafficking cases occur in Libya, against 1% in Niger (and 2% in Algeria). IOM 2017b.

50 Graham-Harrison, Emma. 2017. *Migrants from west Africa being 'sold in Libyan slave markets'*. *The Guardian*, sec. World news. Accessed 11 April 2017.

51 Tinti, Peter, and Tom Westcott. 2016. *The Niger-Libya corridor: Smugglers' perspectives*. ISS Paper. Institute for Security Studies/The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. Accessed 2 June 2017; Merlin, Yann. 2017. *Rançon, viol, torture: récits de migrants rescapés de l'enfer libyen*. *Mediapart*.

52 IOM. 2016a. *Assessing the risks of migration along the central and eastern mediterranean routes: Iraq and Nigeria case study countries*. Geneva: IOM.

53 UNICEF. 2017. *A Deadly Journey for Children: The Central Mediterranean Migration Route*. UNICEF. Accessed 20 May 2017.

54 Personal interview, OHCHR Dakar

Conditions of movement and vulnerabilities of people on the move

Vulnerabilities of people on the move

Vulnerability results from the dynamic interplay between individual or collective circumstances (resources or lack thereof) and factors in the surrounding environment, (exposure to specific risks). For instance, migrants' vulnerability to economic exploitation can be the combined result of economic circumstances in their home places (forcing them to contract debts to fund their journey), of restrictive migration policies (making the journey costlier and routes more remote) and of the internal dynamics of what is here termed the migration economy. Relations between migration and vulnerability are thus multi-dimensional and dynamic.

The conditions that people on the move face during their journey influences their exposure to certain risks. Their vulnerability to these risks are shaped by various factors relating to both the environmental context and their individual circumstances. Many factors influence the conditions under which people move and frame the risks that people face. This section looks at four major factors framing the conditions people face while on the move: (1) the regulatory context; (2) technology, including transportation and communication; (3) the migration economy; and (4) social networks and structures.

The regulatory context

Factors of vulnerability

- ▶ Restrictive migration control regimes tend to increase the volumes of unauthorized migration. Anti-smuggling measures often increase migrants' vulnerability on migration routes, as travelling without being detected often involves additional risks.
- ▶ State officials can monetize their position by abusing their power vis-à-vis migrants, refugees or potential migrants for obtaining relevant papers or being allowed to proceed further along migration journeys. Bribes are often involved in negotiating the passage of borders or checkpoints, or in obtaining (fake) documents.⁵⁵

The legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as the actions of state agents, provide an important context within which migratory movements take place. Legal measures facilitating mobility strengthen migrants' positions and enable more diverse geographies of movement. When movement is relatively free, such as in the ECOWAS space, individual migration trajectories can take any form, according to one's economic means and rationales. Conversely, the more legal or/administrative restrictions are put on mobility, the more migrants need to resort to irregular means of movement. Irregular routes are more specific and fast shifting because they take advantage of local, temporary weaknesses in border enforcement regimes. For most West African migrants, border control and enforcement regimes at the northern border of ECOWAS thus mark a shift in the conditions of mobility.⁵⁶

Another dimension of regulatory regimes concerns legal frameworks applying to refugees and asylum seekers. They include the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol, ratified by all ECOWAS countries and Mauritania, and the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU)'s Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

⁵⁵ Brachet, Julien. 2005. Migrants, transporteurs et agents de l'État : rencontre sur l'axe Agadez-Sebha. *Autrepart* 36 (4): 43.

⁵⁶ Dean, Laura. 2017. In Agadez. *London Review of Books* blog. Available at <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2017/06/05/laura-dean/in-agadez/>>.

Technology, including transportation and communication

Factors of vulnerability

- ▶ The lack of infrastructure, or the lack of access to such infrastructure, is an important factor of vulnerability for migrants. For instance, undocumented migrants are denied the possibility to fly to their destination, or to use official money transfer services.
- ▶ The lack of transportation infrastructures in the Sahara creates a high dependency towards smugglers. The lack of communication infrastructures isolates migrants, thus weakening the possibility of resorting to outside assistance.

Roads, air routes and railways are part of broader patterns connecting places of labour surpluses with poles of economic activities. They are themselves factors of economic growth, such as villages and towns along migration and displacement axes and at important transit points. Mobility is also sustained by the development of communication and banking technologies and services.⁵⁷ Internet cafes, mobile phones or money transfer services make it easier for people on the move to stay connected with their home communities, to circulate financial resources when needed, or to seek information on available options to organize their journey.⁵⁸ The same tools are also critical to the functioning of smuggling networks.

The migration economy

Factors of vulnerability

- ▶ The costs incurred for smuggling services on migration routes can lead migrants to desperate forms of fund seeking. Recent data collected from interviews with migrants suggest cases of organ removals and clandestine blood donations as a means to fund the following section of a journey.⁵⁹
- ▶ Payment modalities, where migrants enter smuggling networks free of charge against a future repayment, either on migration routes, at destination, or both, are of particular concern. They tend to blur the distinction between smuggling and trafficking, as they give way to many forms of exploitation. This type of arrangement is integral, for instance, to the trafficking of Nigerian women into the European prostitution trade.⁶⁰
- ▶ Other forms of value production relate to the direct exploitation of migrants, with such practices as forced labour, prostitution or kidnapping for ransom.
- ▶ While remittances can contribute towards increasing migration, this in itself does not produce vulnerability. But it might do so in a specific context where remittances come mainly from outside of West Africa, and where options for regular migration outside the region are limited. Remittance flows impact people's decisions to undertake journeys where they incur the risks inherent to the land and sea routes to North Africa or beyond, or/and in becoming unauthorized in destination countries.

Various agents take part in the economy of migration. Many of these stakeholders only participate in peripheral ways in facilitating mobility, a local business selling international sim cards for instance. Others are at the heart of the system, such as smugglers or traffickers. Profit seeking participates in shaping specific contexts that create vulnerabilities. Vulnerability is thus tied to the forms of value production in the migration economy. This report focuses on three elements of the migration economy; the migration industry, new territorial economies and remittances.

57 Walton-Roberts and Hennebry 2014.

58 Such as Orange Money in Senegal, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire.

59 IOM 2017b.

60 IOM. 2016a. Assessing the risks of migration along the central and eastern mediterranean routes: Iraq and Nigeria case study countries. Geneva: IOM.

Migration Industry

The “migration industry” is the total of economic actors extracting profits by either facilitating or restricting migration. It is composed of a vast variety of agents, including “labour recruiters and brokers, smugglers and traffickers, false document brokers, (...) services and businesses aimed at migrants – most notably remittance sending/receiving services”.⁶¹ Transporters are an important addition to the list. While a portion of the migration industry operates through official channels,⁶² many entrepreneurs in the migration industry deal with smuggling or trafficking. On the opposite side stand economic actors extracting profit from restricting movement. Here, the migration industry encompasses the trade in border security, which in West Africa blends external and national public agencies and private business partners providing services to assist public authorities in dealing with unauthorized migration.⁶³

While it is difficult to estimate the volume of correlated economic transactions related to migration, some research has estimated specific aspects. For instance, in 2017, 68.5% migrants interviewed by IOM in Libya mentioned having paid less than USD 1,000 to travel to the country, while 31.1% paid between USD 1,000-5,000.⁶⁴ In 2011, UNODC estimated the aggregated value of the international sex trade of West Africans at USD 228 million per year.⁶⁵

The migration industry strives on migrants’ dependency regarding its services, thus creating proliferating forms of vulnerability.

New territorial economies

In many places located on migration routes, the arrival of migrants has created opportunities that have transformed local economic life, creating ‘new territorial economies’. Migration thus reshapes economies in two ways: on the one hand, a part of local populations becomes involved in the migration industry per se. On the other hand, the economic boom created by the influx of migrants irrigates the economy at large by expanding local consumer markets in sectors like accommodation, transport, banking and telecommunication.⁶⁶

Local residents re-invest established knowledge, skills and resources to tap into migration-related economic markets. For instance, Toubou or Touareg caravaners have often shifted to transporting people across the Sahara in northern Niger.⁶⁷ Locals often use migrants as a cheap workforce, feeding all kinds of menial jobs.⁶⁸ This is most notable in the Sahelian belt and in North Africa, where unauthorized migration generates massive financial flows. Thus, Saharan towns have grown into urban centres around strategic transportation nodes.⁶⁹ The reliance of Sahelian towns on migration-related economic activities has been evidenced by the reported economic slowdown in Agadez following interventions to shut down the route to Libya in early 2017.⁷⁰

New territorial economies emerge wherever people flow in from elsewhere, be it as migrants, refugees or IDPs. With many refugee camps located in border areas, they have often fostered new trans-border economies, leveraging on refugees’ connection in different countries.⁷¹ The influx of refugees into urban centres can also expand consumer markets and increase demand for goods and services, something which has both negative (straining of local services) and positive (injection of capital and labour into local areas) effects. The economy of migration is thus much broader than suggested by official remittances figures (see below), or through the analysis of the smuggling industry and trafficking networks. It has often become the backbone of entire territories, reframing local economies. However, given the high instability of migration routes, these economies are particularly prone to sudden collapse as the migration industry moves elsewhere due to a range of external factors including securitisation of migration by the state.

61 Walton-Roberts and Hennebray 2014, 76.

62 Toronjo, Dolores Redondo. 2008. Les «contrats en origine» dans la production intensive des fraises à Huelva. *Études rurales* (182): 169–184.

63 Andersson, Ruben. 2016. Europe’s failed ‘fight’ against irregular migration: ethnographic notes on a counterproductive industry. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42 (7): 1055–1075.

64 IOM. 2017c. DTM Libya Round 9 Migrant Report March - April 2017. IOM.

65 UNODC 2011.

66 Ibid.

67 Brachet, Choplin, and Pliez 2011.

68 UNODC 2011; Gatti, Fabrizio. 2010. Bilal: sur la route des clandestins. Translated by Jean-Luc Defromont. Paris, France: L. Levi; Daniel, Serge. 2008. Les routes clandestines: l’Afrique des immigrés et des passeurs. Paris, France: Hachette Littératures, DL 2008.

69 Brachet, Julien. 2009. Migrations transsahariennes: vers un désert cosmopolite et morcelé (Niger). Collection Terra. Bellecombe-en-Bauges: Croquant.

70 Saley, Omar. 2017. Niger’s migrant smuggling hub empties after EU crackdown. Reuters. Accessed 21 May 2017.

71 Omata, Naohiko. 2012. Struggling to find solutions: Liberian refugees in Ghana. UNHCR research paper (24).

Remittances

The most obvious economic dimension of migration is migrants' economic accumulation and consumption, including money transfers towards their home countries. In 2015, official figures put global remittances to West Africa at almost USD 28 billion.⁷² These numbers do not include informal transfer arrangements, whose volume is difficult to estimate by nature.⁷³ ECOWAS and individual West African countries thus negotiate conflicting incentives: on the one hand, advanced industrialized countries increasingly channel foreign aid toward migration control measures. On the other hand, ECOWAS and West African countries promote a positive view of migration, reflecting the importance of remittances in their GDPs.

While remittances can contribute towards increasing migration, this in itself does not produce vulnerability. But it might do so in a specific context where remittances come mainly from outside of West Africa, and where options for regular migration outside the region are limited. Remittance flows impact people's decisions to undertake journeys where they incur the risks inherent to the land and sea routes to North Africa or beyond, or/and in becoming unauthorized in destination countries.

Social networks and structures

Factors of Vulnerability

- ▶ Social affiliations can result in facilitating exploitative practices among groups of kin/nationalities
- ▶ Social pressure can lead people to take the risks involved in irregular migration, and prevent objective analysis of the risks of the journey.
- ▶ Social pressure can influence people's decisions to take risks while traveling, or to continue traveling in dangerous circumstances, rather than face the shame of returning home.

Social relations, norms, values and practices across West Africa facilitate migration on different grounds, and at different stages of the migration process. On migration routes, social affiliations linked to kinship, national, linguistic, religious or ethnic ties can build solidarity between migrants and other agents, including border or security guards, transporters or smugglers. Conversely, forms of trust related to these shared belongings can be used for migrants' exploitation. Smugglers and traffickers tapping into migrants' social networks leverage on this form of trust to recruit new clients or find victims. Within West Africa, migrants transiting through cities and towns often gather in specific quarters (ghettos) according to nationality, under the authority of a ghetto "boss".⁷⁴

Migration has, among some communities, been institutionalized as an ordinary, expected and valued stage in a life trajectory, constituted as a rite of passage.⁷⁵ In many regions, sedentary families, feeling marginalized both economically and in terms of social prestige, put pressure on their young to seek work abroad. In locations with a high prevalence of migrants, young people who remain sedentary may be sidelined on the matrimonial market, as reported in Mali and Senegal.⁷⁶ Social pressure is exerted on West African migrants abroad, who tend to conceal their hardship to their families and friends back home, thus preventing an accurate evaluation of risks for those willing to leave.⁷⁷ Eventually, the shame of returning after a failed attempt to migrate increases migrants' willingness to take risks that they might not have been prepared to take otherwise.⁷⁸

72 AfDB. 2015. West Africa Monitor Quarterly. Accessed 8 May 2017.

73 Maimbo, Samuel Munzele, and Nikos Passas. 2005. The regulation and supervision of informal funds transfers systems. In *Remittances: development impact and future prospects*, edited by Samuel Munzele Maimbo and Dilip Ratha, 211–227. Washington, DC: World Bank; The fact, for instance, that Mauritania recorded no remittances whatsoever in 2015 is yet another testimony of this difficulty.

74 Brachet 2009, 135; Daniel 2008; UNODC. 2015. UNODC Regional Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants in West and Central Africa 2015-2020. UNODC.

75 Kandel and Massey 2002; Bastide, Loïs. 2015. Habiter le transnational: Espace, travail et migration entre Java, Kuala Lumpur et Singapour. ENS éditions. *De l'Orient à l'Occident*. Lyon; P. D. Fall 2007Beauchemin, Cris. 2011. Rural–urban migration in West Africa: towards a reversal? Migration trends and economic situation in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. *Population, Space and Place* 17 (1): 47–72.

76 Bolzman, Claudio, Théogène-Octave Gakuba, and Martin Amalaman. 2017. Honte et migration : une relation complexe à saisir. *Pensée plurielle* 44 (1): 129.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

Vulnerable groups

This section focuses on migrants' individual circumstances and vulnerabilities. While it offers a categorisation of vulnerable groups and their vulnerabilities, defining vulnerable groups for the ease of presentation must not obscure the fact that many individuals pertain to different categories at the same time (i.e., refugee children; trafficked women; asylum seekers). Although in theory international legal frameworks exist that protect the rights of all people on the move, in reality, significant protection gaps persist in mixed migration settings. Thus, mapping the vulnerabilities associated with certain groups of people on the move can serve as a basis for identifying these gaps in protection, on a legal and well as programmatic level.⁷⁹

Displaced persons and refugees

Identified vulnerabilities

- ▶ Legal vulnerability due to the administrative processing of asylum claim or to the loss of refugee status following secondary movement
- ▶ Threats to livelihood due to the lack of access to economic activities
- ▶ Social isolation and separation
- ▶ Conflictual relations with local populations
- ▶ Heightened levels of violence in displacement contexts
- ▶ Lack of access to assistance and aid

Displaced persons and refugees are forced to move because of immediate threats to their physical well being. Refugee status entails the legal recognition of their vulnerability and of the legitimacy of the resulting mobility. In the context of the various conflicts in West Africa, *prima facie* recognition of refugee status has been the norm.⁸⁰

For displaced persons, vulnerabilities can stem from the inadequate administrative processing of asylum claims. In Senegal, for instance, the administrative procedure takes up to five years to complete, leaving asylum seekers in a legal limbo during this period.⁸¹ European countries also often take a restrictive reading of their international obligation regarding asylum rights, which translates into the partial externalization of asylum claims processing to third countries, such as Turkey, and, more important in the West African context, into ideas to replicate this approach in Libya. It has also reportedly resulted in breaches in the principles of non-refoulement, with documented cases of undue expulsions from Italy.⁸² West African IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers further suffer from vulnerabilities specific to regional patterns of displacement. Whereas at the global scale 60% of displaced persons take shelter in urban areas, in the region's main areas of displacement (Nigeria, Niger, Mali), this proportion is less than 10% on average. This situation renders displaced persons highly dependent on aid, due to fewer economic opportunities in rural territories.⁸³

Given the difficulty to sustain their livelihoods, IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees sometimes engage in secondary migration with the aim of bettering their circumstances, with no guarantee of being recognized as refugees in the following country of destination.⁸⁴ Anecdotal accounts from early 2017 in Agadez, Niger, describe Mauritians, Cameroonians and Malians, as well as Chadians, Nigeriens and Nigerians affected by the Lake Chad crisis moving across

79 Here, it is useful to stress strongly that migration is also a resource and can support strategies of survival or social and economic mobility. However, the report focusses on the relationship between migration and vulnerability.

80 A *prima facie* approach entails the recognition by a State or UNHCR of refugee status based on readily apparent, objective circumstances in the country of origin or, in the case of stateless asylum-seekers, their country of former habitual residence. A *prima facie* approach acknowledges that those fleeing these circumstances are at risk of harm that brings them within the applicable refugee definition.

81 Personal interview, OHCHR Dakar.

82 Amnesty International. 2016. Hostpot Italy: How EU's flagship approach leads to violations of refugee and migrant rights. Amnesty International.

83 UNICEF 2016. Unpublished report.

84 Gatti 2010; Van Hear, Nicholas, Rebecca Brubaker, and Thais Bessa. 2009. Managing mobility for human development: The growing salience of mixed migration.

the region in search of asylum. Reportedly, some among these individuals had lodged a first asylum claim within the region, but moved on because of the long processing periods in certain countries.⁸⁵

Irregular migrants

Identified vulnerabilities

- ▶ Radical dependency towards smugglers, especially in the Sahara and for the Mediterranean crossing
- ▶ Exploitation on migration routes (forced labour, prostitution, etc.)
- ▶ Diversion into trafficking
- ▶ Legal vulnerability and lack of access to basic services beyond ECOWAS countries
- ▶ Deportation from transit or destination countries

For “voluntary” migrants moving without authorization, the main forms of vulnerability are geographically circumscribed. In West Africa, they rise significantly on routes beyond ECOWAS. The main vulnerability faced by migrants on these routes is their high dependency towards the smuggling industry, which puts them at risk of abuses and exploitation, or even being coerced into trafficking networks. Unauthorized migration leads to irregularization in transit and destination countries. This puts people in vulnerable legal positions, making them prone to deportation, exploitation and restricts their access to basic goods and services.

Victims of trafficking

Identified vulnerabilities

- ▶ Contrary to unauthorized voluntary migrants, trafficked persons cannot be qualified as vulnerable to exploitation: they are being exploited, with all related risks to their health and well-being. Many risks incurred by other types of migrants are thus not relevant to this category, as they are already realized.
- ▶ For a trafficked person, this all-encompassing vulnerability can be prolonged by the failure of public authorities to provide adequate protection once a case is detected.

In terms of vulnerability, trafficking displays a specific feature: its economic model is founded on the radical vulnerability of the victim, which makes exploitation possible. Trafficking in the context of migration thrives by producing multiple, various and proliferating forms of vulnerability. Migration is an important factor in the process. It restricts individual agency by isolating trafficked persons, effectively cutting them off from their social resources. At the same time, moving people across international borders can be a way of compromising their access to legal support. Forms of indebtedness are integral to trafficking strategies, as they increase the dependency towards traffickers. Collective indebtedness is particularly efficient in this respect, as the individual becomes accountable for collective resources invested in her/his migration. Another issue concerns the lack of protection of victims of trafficking by state authorities.⁸⁶

85 RMMS field research interview.

86 Adepoju, Aderanti, Femke Van Noorloos, and Annelies Zoomers. 2010. Europe's Migration Agreements with Migrant-Sending Countries in the Global South: A Critical Review. *International Migration* 48 (3): 42–75.

Children

Identified vulnerabilities

- Increased susceptibility of being trafficked
- Risk of sexual exploitation, especially for girls
- Increased vulnerability to multiple forms of abuse and violence in displacement contexts and on migration routes
- Lack of access to basic services, including education and health

Children and adolescents incur specific vulnerabilities in all West African migration contexts. These vulnerabilities vary greatly along age and gender lines. Children seem to be at higher risk of trafficking. In sub-Saharan Africa as a whole (no available figure for West Africa alone), children represent 64% of total identified cases of trafficked persons (boys 39%, girls 25%).⁸⁷ Whereas boys mainly enter forced labour, girls also face prostitution. In Nigeria, Boko Haram also reportedly enrolls child soldiers.⁸⁸

Protection issues also concern displacement settings, where adolescents are at risk of abduction, forced marriage, or sexual abuses.⁸⁹ This is the case in refugee camps, which are often characterized by high levels of violence.⁹⁰ This issue is critical in West Africa, given the volumes of displacements and considering that the majority of forcibly displaced are children and adolescents.⁹¹

On migration routes, especially in the harsh environment of the Sahel and Sahara, children are vulnerable to health issues. This adds up to the general lack of access to health facilities among migrants on the routes to North Africa and Europe. In all mobility contexts, children are also at risk of being denied access to education systems.⁹²

Women

Identified vulnerabilities

- Vulnerability to sexual exploitation and sexual violence
- Increased susceptibility of being trafficked. The trade in domestic workers, a domain with a high prevalence of forced labour, involves almost exclusively women and girls. The same goes to an overwhelming extent for prostitution.
- Vulnerability associated with sexual and reproductive health, including pregnancy, in harsh conditions
- Intersectional discrimination in host countries, both as foreigners and on a gender basis

In terms of gender, there are important dynamics at play in West Africa. Migratory movements contain an increasing proportion of women, and women increasingly move alone.⁹³ Migrant women's vulnerability profiles vary greatly according to their specific status in given communities and are highly reliant on different gendered roles across social

87 UNODC. 2016. Global report on trafficking in persons 2016. UNODC.

88 Adamczyk, Ed. 2017. Boko Haram recruited 2,000 child soldiers in 2016: UNICEF. UPI.

89 Kerner, Brad, Seema Manohar, Cécile Mazzacurati, and Mihoko Tanabe. 2012. Adolescent sexual and reproductive health in humanitarian settings. *Forced Migration Review* (40): 21.

90 Jacobsen, Karen. 2002. Can refugees benefit the state? Refugee resources and African statebuilding. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 40 (04). Available at <http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0022278X02004081>. Accessed 18 May 2017.

91 UNICEF 2017. In the Nigeria crisis, for instance, children under the age of 18 represent 58% of all IDPs and refugees.

92 Personal interview, Save the Children Abidjan.

93 Fall, Papa Demba. 2007. La dynamique migratoire ouest africaine entre ruptures et continuités. In Paper for the African Migrations Workshop organised by the International Migration Institute, Oxford University and the Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana on „Understanding Migration Dynamics in the Continent). Accra, Ghana, 18–21. Available at <<http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/events/ghana-african-migrations-workshop/papers/fall.pdf>>. Accessed 8 March 2017.

groups and societies in the region.⁹⁴

Stateless and undocumented persons

Identified vulnerabilities

- ▶ Lack of access to legal remedies
- ▶ Lack of access to basic services
- ▶ Higher dependency on smuggling services and higher probability of being trafficked, due to the difficulty of crossing borders

Statelessness and, more broadly, the lack of identification documents, produces a state of heightened legal vulnerability. It renders mobility more difficult, even within the ECOWAS space of free movement, since migrants cannot support their claim of being ECOWAS citizens. Thus, they may have to use smuggling services within the region and are more susceptible to having to pay bribes, etc. when crossing borders. Undocumented migrants also face difficulties in accessing basic goods and services, including health and education systems.

Environmental migrants

Identified vulnerabilities

- ▶ Permanent impossibility of return, without dedicated legal frameworks to address this issue
- ▶ Conflation with economic migrants, with ensuing related vulnerabilities, including deportation to a country where their livelihood is permanently compromised

The interplay between human mobility and the environment is complex and, except in specific circumstances (such as natural disasters) cannot be reduced to a causal relationship. However, an important specificity of those who move in the context of environmental degradation or change, such as the desertification of large parts of the Sahel, is that it is hardly possible to foresee any returns for populations. As a result, this type of mobility is specific in that return is not a viable option, so that permanent resettlement must be contemplated.

Sexual minorities

Identified vulnerabilities

- ▶ Difficulty to seek asylum within the ECOWAS
- ▶ Intersectional discrimination in host countries

Besides mass displacement, other vulnerabilities can be assessed on an individual basis, such as persecution related to sexual orientation and gender identity, now increasingly recognized as a legitimate motive for the granting of de jure refugee status.⁹⁵ This particular group remains at risk in most West African countries, where laws prohibiting homosexuality are still the norm, making asylum seeking in the region perilous.⁹⁶ Moreover, LGBT migrants or refugees face intersecting discriminations, due to being foreigners and to their sexual orientation.

94 On gender issues in Africa, see for instance: Ndulo and Grieco 2009.

95 International Commission of Jurists, A. 2016. Refugee Status Claims Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Practitioners' Guide. International Commission of Jurists.

96 Rodenbough, Philip P. 2014. On being LGBT in West Africa: A virtual student foreign service project and independent report exploring regional sexual orientation and gender identity issues. Accessed 17 May 2017; personal interview OHCHR regional office for West Africa, Dakar.

Key knowledge gaps

The study of migration patterns, particularly in the context of mixed movements, is challenging because it subverts existing administrative boundaries and statistical units. West African migration is no exception and numerous gaps still characterize available knowledge of the topic in the region.

- ▶ **Data collection systems** are still weak and ill-adapted to capture general migration flows and, to a lesser extent, migrants stocks across the region. Beyond measuring demographic dynamics, there is a lack of qualitative data on drivers and types of migration. Sound empirical data documenting the patterns of migration routes is scarce.⁹⁷

On a more granular level, many West African countries are under-studied when it comes to migration. This includes The Gambia, a striking gap given the importance of the country in contemporary migration flows.

Partly due to the inaccessibility of the area, data on unauthorized migration from West Africa to North Africa remains incomplete, although increasingly systems are being implemented to attempt to address this.

The case is even more stringent for unauthorized migration flows to other destinations, such as the Middle-East, Asia and, particularly, South America. Considering that migration from West Africa to those destinations now equates that to Europe in terms of volume and is on the increase, this is a massive gap.

- ▶ There is a lack of studies on **child mobility** and on **migrant women**. In the latter case, research has explored African women's prominent position in transnational business communities; however, the circumstances of women in transit on the land and sea routes to North Africa and Europe remain under-studied.
- ▶ Given that a substantial share of migrants arriving in Europe by sea to make **asylum claims**, it is difficult to estimate the precise share of migrants actually falling under the legal international definition of refugee status. Aggregated national data on asylum claims can be used to disentangle the different types of migrants on these routes, however, more comprehensive data on this caseload is needed.
- ▶ Data on **trafficking** is extremely blurry. While the phenomenon will remain difficult to characterize in demographical terms, more ethnographic inquiries in places of origin and destination could provide useful knowledge. Another well-known issue with trafficking is the often subtle difference between persons obviously forced into trafficking and persons willingly engaging in activities categorized as trafficking in international or national laws.⁹⁸ For instance, certain types of child work might not be framed as trafficking in West African societies. This needs further elaboration in the region.
- ▶ Much remains to be done to fully understand the mechanisms of the **smuggling business**. This includes the identification of participating agents and their modalities of involvement. It also concerns the typology of smuggling networks (from loose, circumstantial alliances to highly organized criminal syndicates) and their interactions. Eventually, it touches upon the "political economy" ruling the interactions between authorities and irregular agents and practices (including the development of irregular or illegal practices by State agents).⁹⁹
- ▶ Research is further needed to understand the situation of **undocumented West African migrants** within the ECOWAS space of free movement. A specific case concerns stateless people, and the impact of this situation on migration.
- ▶ There is also a need to understand better the fate of migrants **assisted to return** voluntarily, i.e. whether they actually settle back in the country of origin or engage in subsequent migration.¹⁰⁰
- ▶ If data is available on **refugees and IDPs** in managed camps, it remains that little is known on the fate of the large proportion of displaced persons falling outside this category. Only partial knowledge exists, for instance, as to why IDPs in rural setting do not migrate towards cities where more economic opportunities are available. Finally, even if we do know that refugees sometimes engage in onward international migration with the risk of losing their refugee status, much research is needed to understand these processes.

97 Carling, Jørgen. 2016. West and Central Africa. In *Migrant smuggling data and research: A global review of the emerging evidence base*, edited by IOM, 25–53. Geneva: IOM.

98 Lindquist, Johan. 2010. Images and Evidence: Human Trafficking, Auditing, and the Production of Illicit Markets in Southeast Asia and Beyond. *Public Culture* 22 (2): 223–236.

99 Micallef, Mark. 2017. The Human Conveyor Belt : trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya. *Mic. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*.

100 Koser and Kuschminder 2015.

Conclusions

This report argues that mixed migration flows are proportional to the restrictiveness of border regimes, the accessibility of the terrain and transport infrastructure. In West Africa, they are thus mainly located on migration routes leading to North Africa and Europe. Migrants along these routes all suffer from heightened levels of vulnerability. These levels vary to a certain extent across specific groups and according to differentiated modes of entry on migration routes (children, trafficked persons, ECOWAS citizens, etc.) However, these differences tend to disappear in the Sahara, in Libya and in the Mediterranean crossing, where fluid legal and security conditions produce high levels of vulnerability for all West Africans on the move.

In terms of vulnerability, there is a commonality beyond the specifics of individual cases, tied to the many risks produced by migration on these routes. The differences between refugees, economic migrants and other specific groups thus lose significance during the journey, as all migrants are subject to extremely harsh conditions and face high levels of risk. Regarding vulnerabilities, protection needs thus diverge along other lines than the distinction between asylum seekers and other types of people on the move.

The need to design inclusive protection frameworks addressing different types of populations and different forms of vulnerability in migration thus entails addressing various groups and differentiated needs. These are only partly addressed by current frameworks such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, anti-trafficking laws and conventions, or national laws and international frameworks addressing the specific status of child migrants.

While the various protection regimes are important landmarks towards addressing the needs of these different population groups, they leave important parts of West African migrants devoid of any significant protection mechanism, such as those forced to move by environmental factors and those moving in search of social or economic betterment. In order to strengthen the protection of people on the move, more research is needed to better comprehend migration flows, to clarify categories and to tackle the distinction between forced and voluntary migration, or between economic migrants and refugees. Further, although border regimes seem to play a critical role in fostering or reducing the irregularity of migration, including the prevalence of smuggling, and thus greatly impact the levels of vulnerability for people on the move, more knowledge is needed on the interplay between border regimes and the protection of people on the move.

