

# 6.

## Overview of migration trends and patterns in the Republic of the Niger, 2016–2019<sup>1</sup>

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BORDER MANAGEMENT

**Abstract:** This chapter provides an overview of migration trends and patterns in the Niger from January 2016 to December 2019. Migration trends shifted drastically after the implementation of the 2015-36 Law, which criminalized irregular migration. Migration routes became more fragmented and outgoing flows towards Libya decreased significantly from 2017 onwards. The profiles of migrants also changed, with fewer foreign nationalities migrating through the Niger and people from the Niger increasingly migrating to Algeria, in addition to Libya. A key trend emerging in 2018 and 2019 was the significant increase in flows to the Niger from Algeria as a result of the strict enforcement of immigration laws in Algeria, leading to the expulsion and repatriation of migrants to and through the Niger.

### 6.1. Introduction

The Niger is at the centre of intraregional, interregional and internal migration. Located on important migration routes linking West, Central, East and North Africa, its strategic position makes it a key transit country for migrants. Indeed, numerous regional migration routes converge and cross in the Niger, a major country of transit for migrants seeking to reach other countries in West and Central Africa, or travelling to and from North Africa, as well as for migrants travelling to the Niger as a final destination, mainly for economic opportunities.

Mobility in the Niger has many interacting layers, including circular movements of seasonal migrants who work in agriculture, mainly in Libya and increasingly in Algeria; tradespeople headed for markets; migration of women and children going to Algeria to beg and sell on the street; and migration to regions in the Niger with economic activity, such as gold mines, oil drilling sites and crop-raising areas where some migrants may work temporarily during their transit periods in the Niger to save money before continuing their journeys. Another important dimension of mobility in the Niger is the repatriation and expulsion of people from the Niger, and migrants from West and Central Africa from Algeria.

<sup>1</sup> This chapter was written with support and insightful inputs from the Information Management Unit and the Displacement Tracking Matrix teams in the Niger; including in particular Murat Dominique Vagery, Ousmane Chegou Kore, Ismael Alio Tiemogo, Djibrilla Moustapha, Mahaman Noura Sani Salissou, Dan Ballan Mahamn Sani and Boubacar Issoufou Tiado

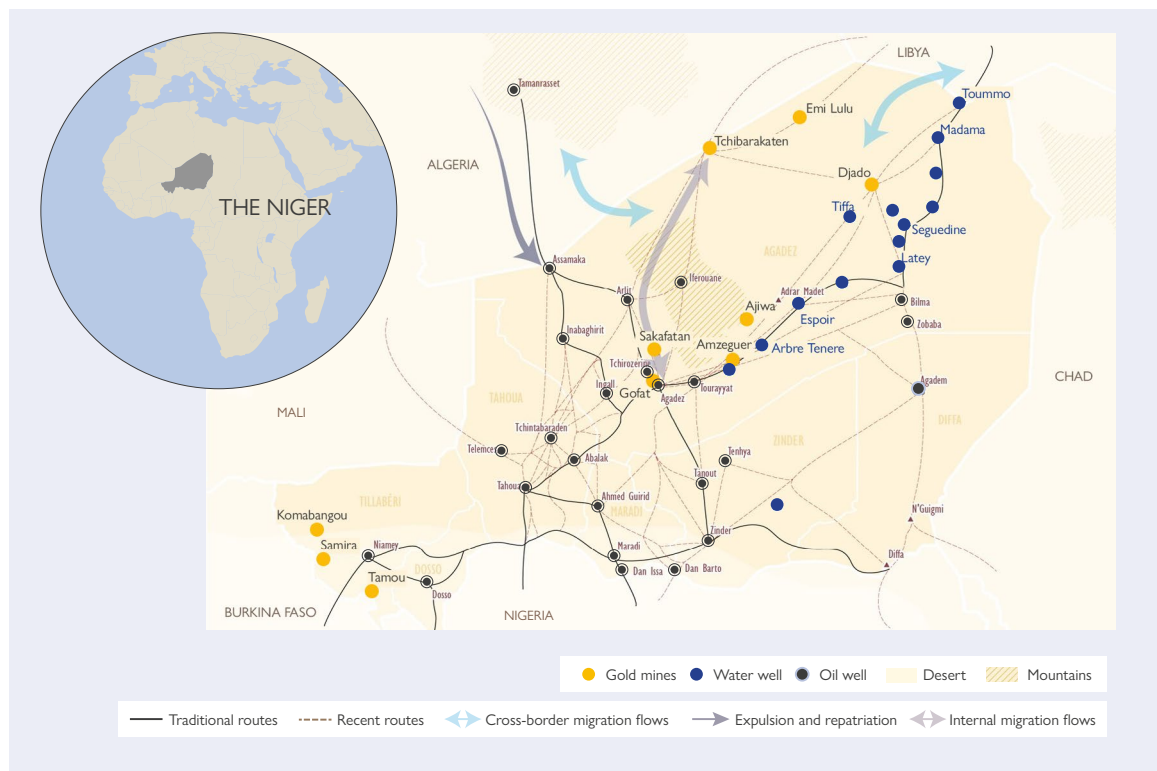
<sup>2</sup> IOM Niger.

Migration trends have shifted significantly in the past few years as a result of different factors, including the ongoing crisis in Libya and growing insecurity in the border regions since 2011; the adoption of the law against the unlawful trafficking of migrants (*Loi N° 2015-36 relative au trafic illicite de migrants*) on 26 May 2015 by the Government of the Niger, criminalizing irregular migration; the discovery and closure of gold mines in the Niger; and stricter immigration policies adopted by Algeria.

This paper will highlight the main trends observed in the Niger from February 2016 to December 2019. The main data sources used include IOM Niger's flow monitoring data, which capture cross-border flows and migratory flows within the Niger, and datasets of migrants registered in one of IOM Niger's six transit centres. The majority of the migrants in these datasets have been expelled and repatriated from Algeria.<sup>3</sup>

First, the key trends and patterns in cross-border migration between the Niger, Algeria and Libya will be presented. This will be followed by an analysis of migration trends within the Niger for migrants who travel to the Niger as their final destination. Finally, the phenomenon of return migration trends as a result of repatriations and expulsions will be discussed.

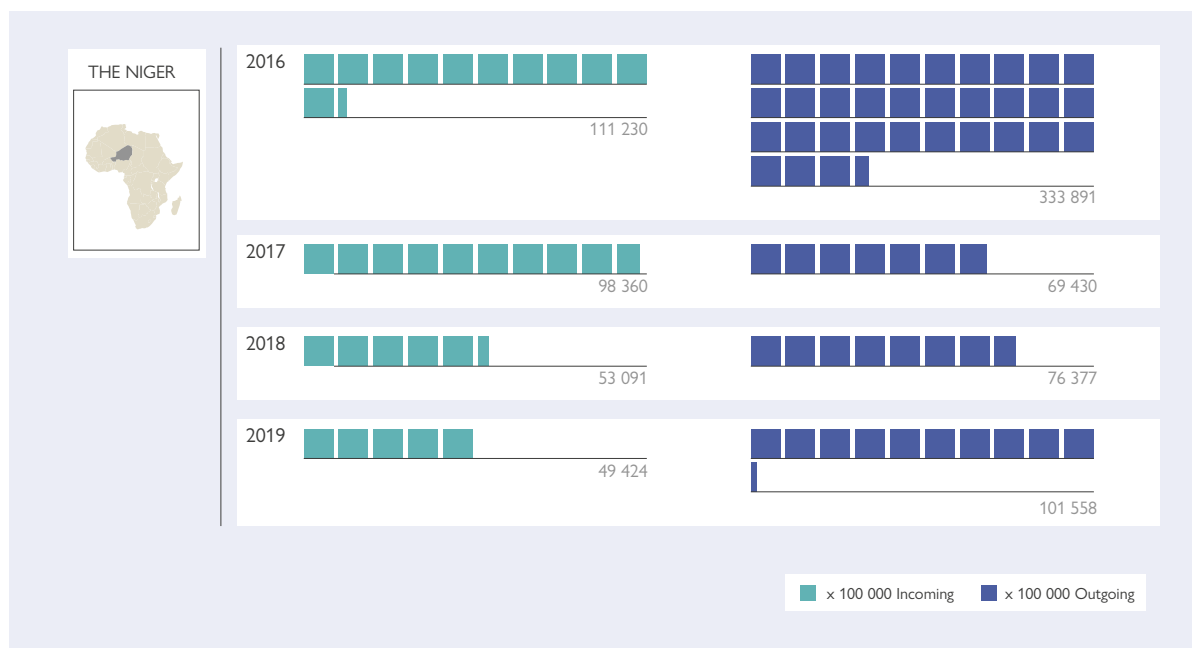
**Figure 6.1.** Map of migration routes and main economic zones of interest in the Niger



Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

<sup>3</sup> Data sources are described in more detail within the respective sections.

**Figure 6.2.** Migration flows at Arlit and Séguedine Flow Monitoring Points, 2016–2019



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## 6.2. Cross-border flows between the Niger, Libya and Algeria

Cross-border migration flows between the Niger and its neighbours to the north, Algeria and Libya, were observed through the flow monitoring points (FMPs)<sup>4</sup> set up in Arlit and Séguedine since February 2016 to understand the trends and patterns of migration flows to and from Algeria and Libya. These two countries are the final destinations for most migrants while, for some, they are a stepping stone before reaching Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The trends in cross-border migration changed significantly during the period between February 2016 and December 2019. In 2016, over 445,000 migrants were observed migrating between the Niger and Libya and the Niger and Algeria, in both directions. The majority (over 312,000 persons, or 70%) were foreign migrants, mainly of Nigerian, Gambian, Senegalese and Ivorian nationalities, and most (nearly 300,000 persons or 67%) were headed to Libya or countries in Europe (see Figure 6.3). However, in 2017, trends shifted considerably. The implementation of Law No. 2015–36 of 26 May 2015 criminalizing the smuggling of migrants in the Niger<sup>6</sup> contributed to a sharp (62%) decrease in migration flows to and from Algeria and Libya, as observed by the FMPs. Increased patrols and security forces enforcing the law, and stiff punishments for those caught smuggling or transporting migrants illegally, led to the fragmentation of migration routes in efforts to evade controls. Migration routes, which originally followed the national roads, disintegrated into a multitude of informal bypass routes that changed frequently, rendering migrants more vulnerable

<sup>4</sup> The flow monitoring methodology is used to collect quantitative data on the number of migrants and basic demographic information. IOM enumerators collect data at FMPs using a mixed-method approach of direct observation and semi-structured interviews with key informants (such as personnel at bus stations, police or customs officials, bus or truck drivers or migrants). Data are collected at the group level using a standardized questionnaire to understand the estimated number of migrants disaggregated by sex, age, nationality and area of departure and destination. FMP data have been collected daily since February 2016 at the FMPs in Arlit (key transit point to Algeria) and Séguedine (key transit point to Libya).

<sup>5</sup> The FMP data used in this analysis are from February 2016 to December 2019.

<sup>6</sup> The law penalizes both irregular entry and exit of any person who is not a national of the Niger or a foreigner legally resident of the Niger, and penalizes the migrant person as well as the smuggler.

to exploitation by their smugglers. Those who still chose to migrate despite these obstacles faced increased risks, as journeys through the vast Sahara desert became more dangerous. At the same time, migration movements became more difficult to record and quantify. As people from the Niger were not subject to the controls following the 2015–36 Law, however, factors explaining the decreasing numbers of people from the Niger going to Libya may include increased insecurity in Libya.<sup>7</sup> As such, the flows to and from Libya from 2017 onwards have become more established circular migration patterns, consisting overwhelmingly (around 90% in 2017–2019) of people from the Niger going to and from Libya, with the highest levels of flows consistently observed at the end of the rainy season, around September and October each year. However, despite decreasing numbers of people from the Niger observed migrating to and from Libya, the proportion of people from the Niger leaving for Libya versus returning to the Niger has more than doubled since 2018, indicating that people from the Niger are migrating for longer periods.<sup>8</sup>

The effects of the 2015-36 Law were not so pronounced along the route to and from Algeria in 2017 compared with 2016. However, drastic changes were observed in 2018. The number of foreign migrants – mainly from Mali, Guinea, Nigeria and Cameroon – dropped from around 54,000 in 2016 to around 40,500 in 2017, with a larger drop in 2018 to 20,300 and in 2019 to 14,200. The decrease in 2018 may be a result of Algeria's strict enforcement of its immigration laws, starting at the end of 2017 and into 2018 and 2019, leading to an increased number of migrants being expelled and repatriated to the Niger in large groups. The increased presence of Algerian troops to reinforce its border with the Niger, as well, may also have been a deterring factor for migrants, especially foreign migrants, explaining the decrease in the number of foreign migrants observed going to Algeria.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the number of people from the Niger observed going to and from Algeria increased in the same time period, most significantly in 2019 (around 5,000 in 2016, 13,000 in 2017, 20,000 in 2018, and 65,000 in 2019), indicating people from the Niger migrating increasingly to Algeria to seek economic opportunities, and as an alternative to Libya, perhaps due to growing insecurity in the country.<sup>10</sup> As the number of foreign migrants observed travelling between the Niger and Algeria has been decreasing, people from the Niger are increasingly travelling on this route, and are now making up a growing proportion (92%) of flows observed between the Niger and Algeria, with 82 per cent of all flows observed to and from Algeria in 2019 consisting of people from the Niger, a drastic change from previous years, when people from the Niger made up only a minority of flows (17% or 11,000).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The number of people from the Niger going to and from Libya decreased more gradually over the years: a 25 per cent decrease between 2016 and 2017, a 32 per cent decrease between 2017 and 2018, and a 5 per cent decrease between 2018 and 2019.

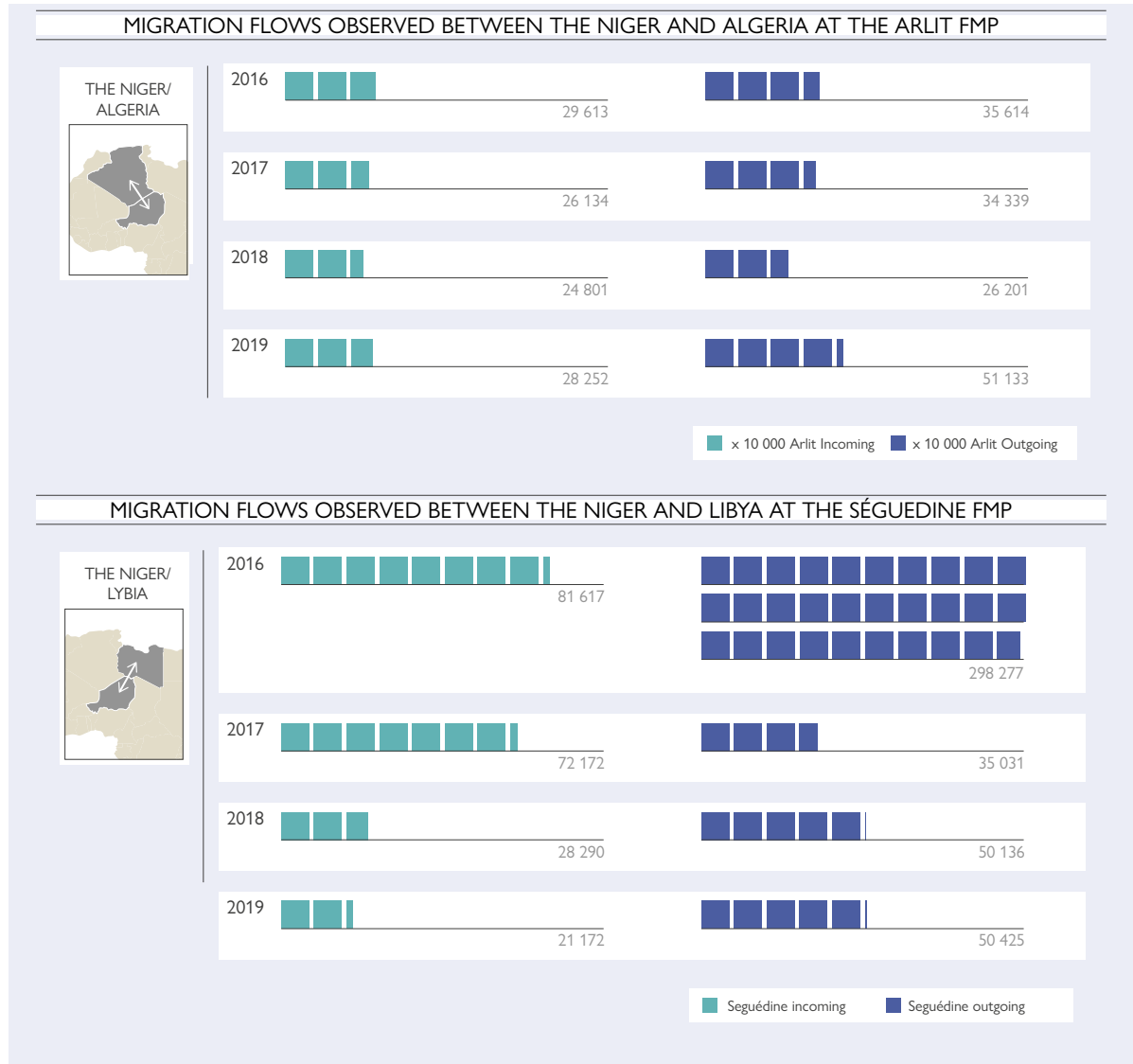
<sup>8</sup> In 2018 and 2019, twice the number of people from the Niger were observed going to Libya versus returning from Libya, a reversal of trends from 2016 and 2017, when more people from the Niger were observed to be returning to the Niger than going to Libya.

<sup>9</sup> The oft-changing migration routes to evade patrols and security forces contribute to difficulties in quantifying movements. IOM Niger uses its network of focal points located in key points along the migration corridors to understand the changes in the migration routes.

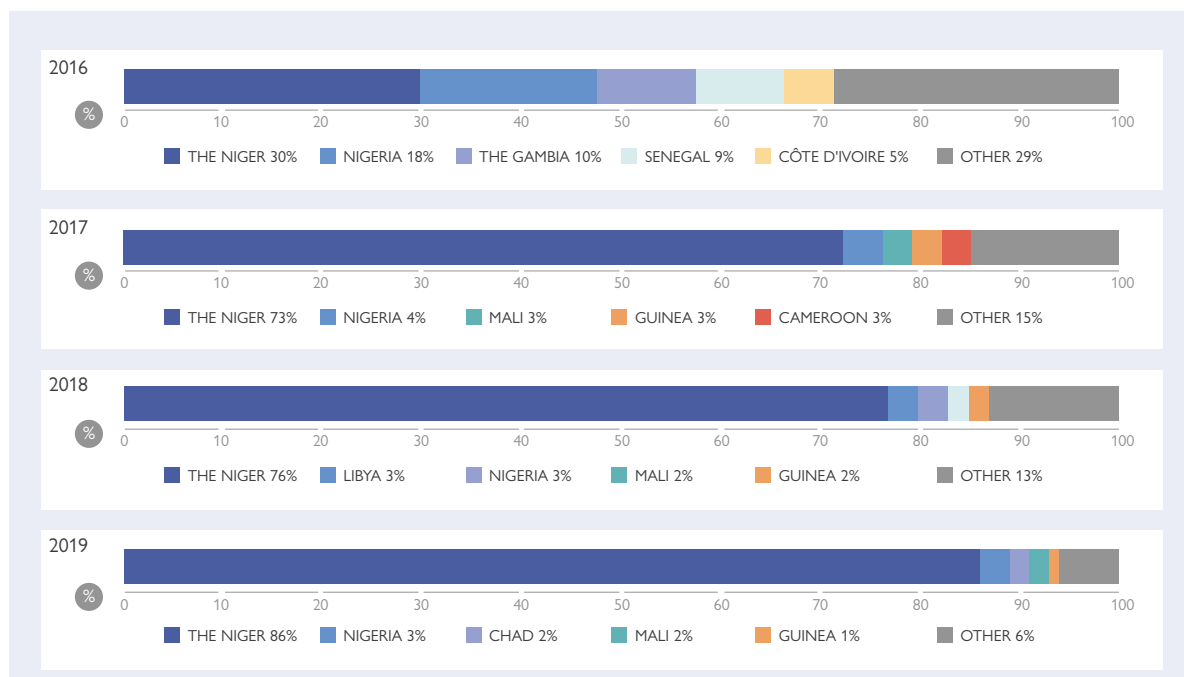
<sup>10</sup> An equal proportion of people from the Niger were observed going to and from Algeria and Libya in 2019, indicating that Algeria, in addition to Libya, had become a major destination for people from the Niger engaged in circular migration. Comparatively, in 2016, less than 10 per cent of all people from the Niger were observed migrating to and from Algeria, while over 90 per cent were observed going to and from Libya.

<sup>11</sup> People from the Niger comprised 17 per cent (11,000 persons) of flows observed between the Niger and Algeria in 2016: 33 per cent or 20,000 persons in 2017, 60 per cent or 31,000 persons in 2018, and 82 per cent or 65,000 persons in 2019.

**Figure 6.3.** Number of incoming and outgoing migrants observed at Arlit and Séguedine flow monitoring points, 2016–2019



Note: These maps are for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

**Figure 6.4.** Percentage of migrants observed crossing Arlit and Séguedine flow monitoring points by nationality, 2016–2019

### 6.3. Migration within the Niger

In addition to being a major transit country, the Niger is also a destination country for migrants looking for economic opportunities. Economic zones of interest such as gold mines attract both people from the Niger and migrants from other West African countries (Figure 6.1). Migration flows within the Niger started to be captured by FMPs in 2018, which includes migrants both of people from the Niger and those of foreign nationalities.<sup>12</sup> In 2018 and 2019, an average of 10,000 to 11,000 people per month were observed migrating within the Niger. In 2019, people from the Niger comprised 80 per cent of all migrants migrating within the Niger (up from 59% in 2018), while foreign migrants represented 20 per cent (down from 41% in 2018). The main foreign nationalities observed were Chadians, Sudanese and Nigerians.

The main destination cities within the Niger for all migrants were Arlit/Assamaka (79%), followed by Tchibarakaten (12%) and Agadez (9%).<sup>13</sup> These cities are all located in the northern part of the Niger, where there are economic opportunities for migrants. Tchibarakaten is located 600 km north-east of Arlit and just 4 km from the Algerian border.

Migrants going to Arlit typically intend to travel further northwards to Algeria and Libya after earning enough money to finance the rest of their migration journeys. Female migrants from the Niger in Arlit are typically engaged in domestic work, while female foreign migrants – mainly those from Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Cameroon – work in brothels or bars to save money. Others live in ghettos or at railway stations in Arlit until they can find a smuggler to take them further north.

<sup>12</sup> Internal migration flows within the Niger are measured based on departure and destination cities, which are both reported to be within the Niger. These data were collected using the FMP methodology at Arlit and Séguedine FMPs. Data used for analysis in this section are from January 2018–December 2019.

<sup>13</sup> IOM Niger FMP data, 2019.

Migrants going to Tchibarakaten intend to work in the gold sites. Tchibarakaten is a village created after the arrival of gold miners (people from the Niger and foreign migrants) in large numbers after the Djado gold site closed in early 2017 due to security concerns. The discovery of gold in Djado in April 2014 led to a gold rush, drawing thousands of prospective gold miners, dominated by foreigners from Chad and the Sudan (Pellerin, 2017). Security concerns led to a decrease in the number of migrants transiting to the north of the country. Following the closure of the site, the gold seekers retreated to the Tchibarakaten site, a remote site along the border with Algeria run predominately by people from the Niger.

In general, gold mines attract tens of thousands of migrants to the northern part of the Niger. These sites host an estimated 450,000 people in the Niger (OECD, 2018), mainly from the Niger, the Sudan, Chad and Nigeria. Despite the fact that several gold mines have been closed by the authorities, a significant number of them continue to operate illegally. Unlike migrants going to Arlit, the rest of the migrants, except for the Sudanese, reported the Niger as their final destination, and their intention was to earn enough money from working in the gold mines before returning home (IOM, 2019). Sudanese migrants, on the other hand, most of whom are from the Darfur region, reported to have left for reasons of war and insecurity, and as such, intended to go to Libya after Tchibarakaten, or to seek asylum in the Niger.

In addition, there are many iron mines in the northern part of the Niger which also attract migrants. Oil sites in Diffa have also attracted workers, although instability and insecurity in that region since 2014 have led to the closure of some oil sites.

## 6.4. Expulsions and repatriations

The strict enforcement of immigration policies in line with the Government of Algeria's Law No. 08-11 – which governs the conditions of entry, stay and circulation of foreign nationals (*Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne*, 2008), particularly towards the end of 2017<sup>14</sup> – led to an unprecedented number of migrants (the majority from Mali and Guinea) being expelled to the Niger, particularly towards the end of 2017.<sup>15</sup> Expulsions continued throughout 2018 and increased further in 2019 (see Figure 6.5). Expelled migrants are dropped off by Algerian authorities at Point Zero, a location at the border between Algeria and the Niger 12 km from Assamaka, the nearest border town in the Niger. IOM Niger conducts Humanitarian Rescue Operations starting at Point Zero to transport migrants stranded at Point Zero to Assamaka.<sup>16</sup> Once in Assamaka, migrants are informed about IOM's assistance, including transportation services to the nearest urban centre, Arlit, and IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Repatriation (AVRR) programme. Migrants who opt for assistance are registered and their basic demographic information is collected.<sup>17,18</sup> Once in Arlit, migrants have the option to stay in IOM's transit centre if they wish to benefit from IOM's AVRR programme to help them return home.

<sup>14</sup> Since 2014, the Government of Algeria started to organize official convoys for the repatriation of hundreds of people from the Niger to go from Algeria to the Niger after the agreement between the two States. The situation became more serious and complex as of August 2017, with the successive waves of arrests of sub-Saharan African nationalities in Algeria (majority Malians and Guineans), who were then placed in detention centres, while access to these camps has been denied to lawyers and/or international organizations.

<sup>15</sup> In 2019, Malians and Guineans represented 56 per cent of migrants expelled to the Niger, based on IOM Humanitarian Rescue Operations registration data.

<sup>16</sup> Migrants who benefit from IOM's emergency assistance through its Humanitarian Rescue Operations are registered by IOM staff. Basic demographic information is collected in order to assist migrants. Data have been collected since August 2017, when an increasing number of migrants were being expelled in large groups.

<sup>17</sup> IOM conducts an initial basic registration in Assamaka for all migrants who wish to be transported to the nearest urban centre, Arlit. As most migrants agree to be assisted, these data provide an estimated number of migrants expelled from Algeria. These data were analysed in this section from September 2017 to December 2019. Once migrants reach Arlit, only migrants who wish to receive further assistance through IOM's AVRR programme are registered (a more detailed registration process) at the transit centre. Usually, around 95 per cent of migrants who are transported from Point Zero and Assamaka also opt for IOM's AVRR programme.

<sup>18</sup> From September 2017 to December 2019, a total of 33,768 migrants were observed and recorded by IOM Niger as expelled to either Point Zero or Assamaka, of which 80 per cent or 27,153 migrants requested IOM's assistance to reach the nearest urban town, Arlit.

The vast majority (97%) agree to be assisted, and stay in the transit centres in the Niger before they are assisted with voluntary return to their home countries, mainly within West and Central Africa.<sup>19,20</sup> The number of expelled migrants from Algeria nearly doubled in 2019 compared with 2018, with 1,296 migrants per month expelled in 2019, compared with 753 per month in 2018 (see Figure 6.5).

Similarly, the number of migrants from the Niger repatriated to the Niger from Algeria more than doubled in 2018 compared with the previous year (from 6,800 in 2017 to nearly 15,000 people from the Niger repatriated in 2018). However, repatriations slowed by 34 per cent in 2019 relative to 2018 (nearly 11,000 repatriated in 2019 compared with nearly 15,000 in 2018). Repatriations of people from the Niger began in December 2014, under an agreement between the Governments of the Niger and Algeria; however, the pace significantly increased in 2018 and 2019 (see Figure 6.6).<sup>21</sup> The majority of people from the Niger originally repatriated migrated to Algeria to seek job opportunities, and the majority of them were women and children from the department of Kantché within the region of Zinder. They were mainly employed in the informal sectors in Algeria, often limited to begging, prostitution and cleaning. This phenomenon is attributed to a combination of factors, including few formal employment opportunities in Algeria combined with large households in Kantché in particular; and decades of tradition of migration as a means to make a living. Historically, the population migrated to Nigeria; however, due to the insecurity related to Boko Haram since 2009, migration shifted northwards to Algeria instead (IOM, 2016).

**Figure 6.5.** Number of migrants expelled by year and monthly rate of expulsions by year, September 2017–December 2019



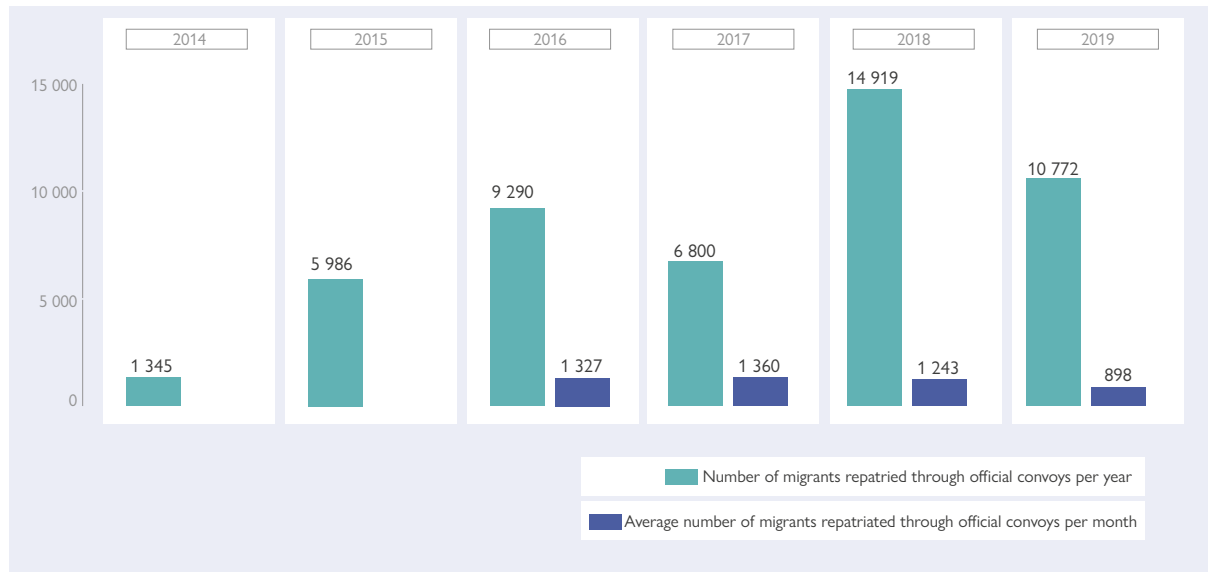
<sup>19</sup> The percentage of migrants expelled from Algeria who were rescued and opted to stay in IOM's transit centre in 2019, a slight increase from 2018 (95%) and 2017 (94%).

<sup>20</sup> Migrants transiting through the Niger who choose to return to their countries of origin or communities of origin (for migrants from the Niger), with the assistance of IOM, temporarily stay in one of IOM's six transit centres across the Niger until their scheduled departures to their home countries or communities. All migrants arriving at the transit centres are registered and informed about their rights, and services provided by IOM. The number of migrants in the transit centres increased from 6,248 in 2016 to 9,099 in 2017, 20,056 in 2018 and 18,534 in 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Since 2014, IOM provides technical and humanitarian support to the Government of the Niger in registering migrants from the Niger returning from Algeria through official convoys, which are organized by the Government of the Niger. IOM staff support the Government by collecting basic demographic data from each migrant, including their area of origin.



**Figure 6.6.** Number of migrants repatriated to the Niger through official convoys from Algeria and monthly rate of repatriations by year, December 2014–December 2019



Source: IOM data on Humanitarian Rescue Operations, indicating migrants expelled from Algeria and assisted by IOM Niger.

## 6.5. Conclusion

Migration in the Niger is internal, intraregional and interregional. People from the Niger and foreign migrants travel to northern parts of the Niger for employment opportunities such as gold mining. Interregional migrants, mainly from West and Central Africa, including people from the Niger, head to North Africa to work in the fields during harvesting season or to find other economic opportunities. Moreover, while migration drivers in the region seem to primarily be economic, there are plenty of other factors driving migration, such as the impact of enforcing strict immigration policies and insecurity in neighbouring countries. The fluid and multidimensional migration trends in the Niger demonstrate the critical role of the country at the crossroads between the western, central and northern regions of Africa.

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