

# AN IOM PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGER:

Profiles, patterns, progress



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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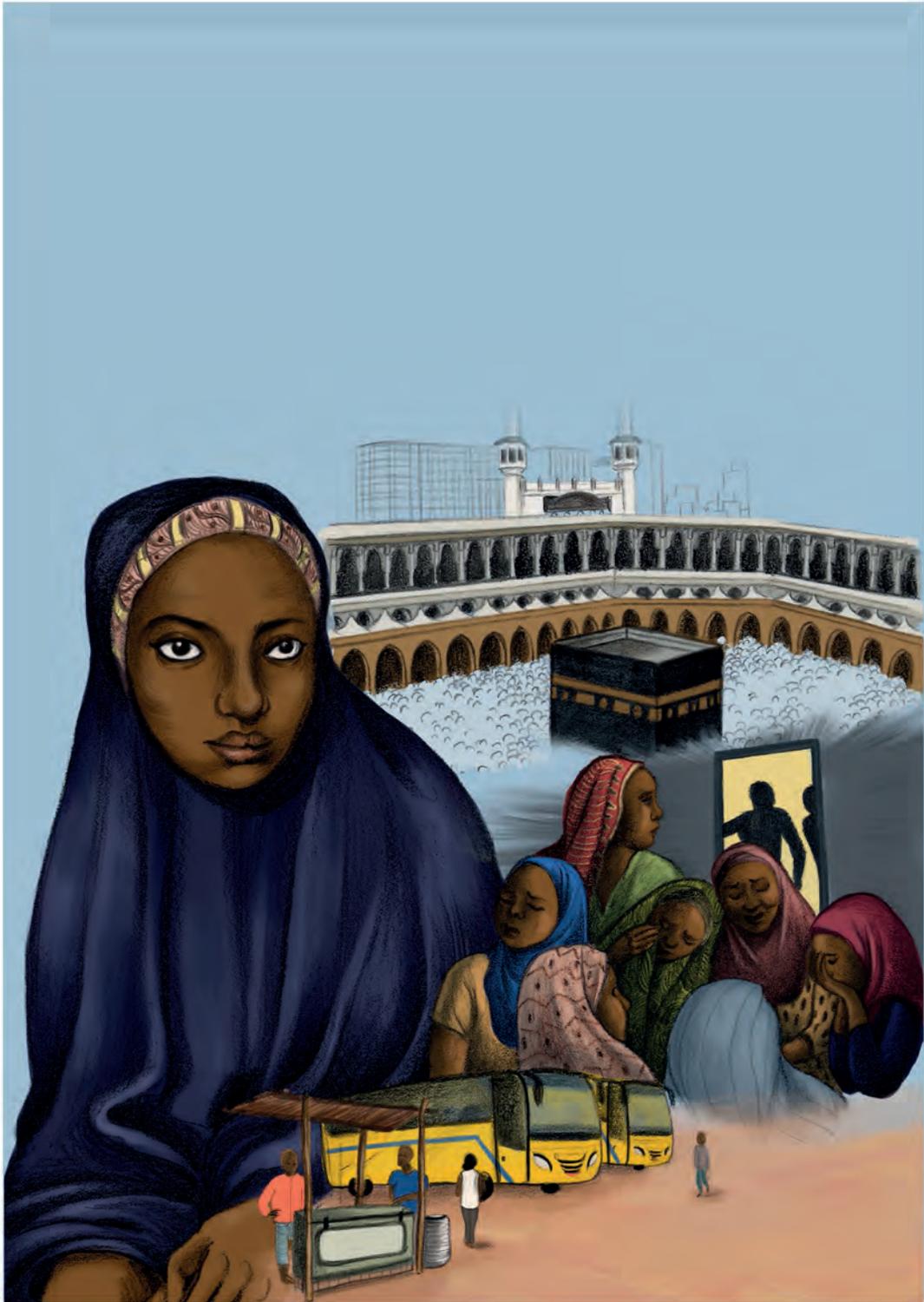
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## PREFACE

Often referred to as a country at the crossroads of migration flows between west, central and north Africa, Niger is at the heart of complex and multifold forms of mobility as a country of origin, transit and destination.

This includes trafficking in human beings. Victims of trafficking include adult migrants seeking jobs who have been lured into exploitative networks, or children who have been sent to look for economic opportunities within and across borders with trusted adults who have de facto become their traffickers.

This publication seeks to paint a picture of the phenomenon of human trafficking in Niger, based on IOM's experience working with the national authorities in their relentless fight against trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants and well as through direct assistance to victims of trafficking in the various transit centers and in the government-run shelter. Based on the data collected, we are able to present a profile of victims and an overview of the complex socio-economic and cultural roots of human trafficking, which can inform future interventions and contribute to strengthening counter-trafficking efforts in Niger.

I would like to thank our key partners in the Government of Niger, the National Agency for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants, the National Commission for the Coordination of the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants, the Ministry of Women Promotion and Child Protection, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, as well the Government of the Netherlands for its financial support under the Cooperation on Migration and Partnerships to Achieve Sustainable Solutions (COMPASS) initiative.

**Barbara Rijks**  
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## ACRONYMS AND LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANAJJ	Agence Nationale de l'Assistance Juridique et Judiciaire (National Agency for Judiciary and Legal Assistance)
ANLTP-TIM	Agence Nationale de Lutte Contre la Traite des Personnes et le Traffic Illicite de Migrants (National Agency for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants)
ANTD	Association Nigérienne pour le Traitement de la Délinquance (Nigerien Association for the Treatment of Delinquency)
AVR	Assisted Voluntary Return
CNCLTP-TIM	Commission Nationale de Coordination de Lutte contre la Traite et le Trafic Illicite de Migrants (National Commission for the Coordination of the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DDPE	Direction Départementale pour la Protection de l'Enfant (Departmental Directorate for Child Protection)
DRPE	Direction Régionale pour la Protection de l'Enfant (Regional Directorate for Child Protection)
DST	Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (Directorate of Territorial Surveillance)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GON	Government of Niger
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

MPFPE	Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant (Ministry of Women Promotion and Child Protection)
TCN	Third Country National
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
UAMC	Unaccompanied Migrant Children
VoT	Victim of Trafficking



Reception of 1,400 Nigerian returnees from Burkina Faso during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: IOM/Monica Chiriac

## TERMINOLOGY

Talibé: from Arabic (tâlib / طالب = student) refers to a student learning the Qur'an. In West Africa, the term talibé is more specifically used to refer to children who were entrusted to a Quranic master, also called marabout, to receive an Islamic education.<sup>1</sup>

Marabout: Quranic master, considered guardians of the faith and spiritual leaders of the populations who consult them for any matter. The status of marabout is not regulated nor officially recognized, which allows potentially anyone to self-proclaim Quranic master. Marabouts traditionally enjoy high social recognition due to their impeccable knowledge of the Qur'an, which also gives unconditional authority to speak within the Muslim Nigerien community.<sup>2</sup>

Madame: in the context of human trafficking, it identifies the female trafficker who handles the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, to whom the debt incurred prior to leaving their country must be repaid.<sup>3</sup>

Confiage: practice of entrusting the care of a child to a third adult person related or unrelated to the family. While this is done with the purpose of ensuring proper care of a child and should not be considered a trafficking practice per se, it can lead children to end up in trafficking scenarios – e.g., when the marabout that they have been entrusted exploits them for forced labor without providing the Quranic education that their families signed them up for.

Location d'enfant: practice similar to confiage, translates literally as child rental, employed for the use of children in forced begging or domestic work with the purpose of earning for the family.

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1 ANTD. *Souffrances Sous Silence: Enquête sur la Mendicité Forcée des Enfants Talibé au Niger* (2020), p.14

2 *Ibid.*, p.17

3 IOM. *Human Trafficking Along the Central Mediterranean Route. Data, stories, and information collected by the International Organization for Migration.* (2017) p.9



# 1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT

## RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

The objective of this report is to provide insight into the phenomenon of human trafficking in Niger while showing the role of IOM Niger in support of the Government of Niger (GoN)'s efforts to combat and prevent human trafficking and assist victims of trafficking (VoT).

### Specific Objectives

- Present a profile of the victims of trafficking identified and assisted in Niger.
- Identify patterns and trends concerning the methods of recruitment and routes used by trafficking networks.
- Present challenges and lessons learnt on direct assistance to VoT.
- Highlight progress and achievements at the national level on countering and preventing human trafficking.

## METHODOLOGY AND LIMITS OF THE REPORT

A consultant was hired to analyze two data sets:

1. Database of victims of trafficking managed by IOM Niger. This database collects data from the transit centers for migrants run by IOM in Arlit, Agadez, Dirkou, and Niamey as well as data from the government-run shelter for VoT located in Zinder, which is supported by IOM.
2. Data reports produced by the National Agency for the Fight Against Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants (ANLTP-TIM).

This data was analyzed to produce information on main trafficking trends looking at routes, points of entry, and types of exploitation; profiles of victims in Niger in terms of gender, age, and nationality; and referral paths to assistance.

In parallel, the consultant investigated the work conducted by IOM with partners and its impact. To do so, the consultant conducted a desk review and analysis of project reports and other documentation related to projects with a counter-trafficking focus or component.

This analysis was complemented by key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders. These included:

### IOM Staff

- Rahamatou Daouda Halidou, Senior Protection Assistant (Counter-Trafficking) - Niamey
- Malika Ka Abdoulaye, Case Worker (UAMC) – Agadez transit center
- Fatima Mohamat Ibrahima, Case Worker (VoT) – Agadez transit center
- Djibir Abdoukader, Case Worker (Men and asylum seekers) – Niamey transit center for men
- Halimatou Hassane Bolmey, Case Worker (VoT) - Niamey transit center for women and children
- Harira Christine Middah Darius, Case Worker (UAMC) - Niamey transit center for families and unaccompanied children

- Amadou Souley Balkissa, Case Worker (Families) - Niamey transit center for families and unaccompanied children
- Jamila Marafa, Psychologist - Niamey transit center for women and children
- Halirou Garba, Psychologist - Niamey transit center for families and unaccompanied children

#### Partners

- Ousmane Mamane, Director-General of the National Agency for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants
- Moussa Adamou, Director of Communications and Advocacy on the Rights of the Child, Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children
- Moumouni Hamidou, President of the National Commission for the Coordination of the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants
- Abdoulaye Laouali, Centre Manager, State Shelter for Victims of Trafficking, Zinder

The consultant conducted in-person interviews with stakeholders based in Niamey and phone interviews with stakeholders based in Agadez and Zinder between September and October 2021. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, through an interview protocol serving as a guiding tool to be adapted according to the different profiles and allowing for free expression of the interviewee.

The report was drafted in close collaboration with the Protection Unit of IOM Niger (Niamey) and was finalized with the support of IOM's Regional Office for West and Central Africa (Dakar).

Among the limitations of this report, it should be noted that the analysis focuses on assistance provided directly by IOM or with the support of IOM. Hence, this report does not provide a comprehensive picture of all human trafficking across Niger.

## CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

It should be highlighted that the focus of this research is human trafficking (or trafficking in persons) and that the research does not look into migrant smuggling, which constitutes a separate phenomenon not to be confused with human trafficking.

However, it should be noted that the two phenomena are often interlinked, especially in the case of certain demographic categories – as will be elaborated further on in the report.

Migrant smuggling is the 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.<sup>4</sup>

According to its legal definition as set out by the Palermo Protocol<sup>5</sup>, trafficking in persons means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Art. 3(a)

<sup>5</sup> Officially known as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

<sup>6</sup> Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Art. 3(a)

The act of trafficking refers to the action through which the trafficker introduces or maintains a victim in the trafficking scenario. Acts of trafficking include recruitment; transportation; transfer; harboring; and receipt of persons.<sup>7</sup>

The means of trafficking describe how the act is perpetrated, meaning the techniques used to attract and maintain the victim in the trafficking scenario. Means (or methods) include threat or use of force; coercion; abduction; fraud and deception; abuse of power or a situation of vulnerability; giving payment or benefits to a third person in control of the victim. These different means all share one condition: the absence of free and informed consent by the victim. This does not necessarily entail overt use of physical force; apparent consent is extracted from the victim through one of the means cited above, for instance by exploiting a situation in which the victim has no alternative but to submit themselves to the trafficking scenario<sup>8</sup> or by deceiving the victim with false promises.

Finally, the purpose refers to the objective of the trafficking, which can include several forms of exploitation. Inter alia, this may include sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or other forms of servitude, exploitation in begging, forced recruitment in armed forces or involvement in criminal gangs, and organ harvesting – as well as a combination of different forms of exploitation.<sup>9</sup> The Palermo Protocol does not provide an exhaustive list of forms of exploitation, and each country can include specific forms of human trafficking in their national legislation depending on national context and specificities. In the case of Niger, the main juridical text for the fight against human trafficking mentions specifically slavery and slavery-related practices, servitude and organ harvesting, exploitation of prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, the exploitation of begging, labor exploitation and forced labor, as well as the recruitment, transportation, transfer and harbouring of children below 18 years of age for the purposes of exploitation.<sup>10</sup>



Psychosocial activity at IOM's transit centre for vulnerable migrants in Agadez. IOM 2020/Monica Chiriac

7 IOM. *Trafficking in Persons: Victim Identification and Assistance Training Guide*, p. 3-4

8 IOM. *Trafficking in Persons: Victim Identification and Assistance Training Guide*, p. 4-5

9 IOM. *Trafficking in Persons: Victim Identification and Assistance Training Guide*, p. 5

10 Ordonnance n° 2010-86 du 16 décembre 2010 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes



# 2 CONTEXT

## COUNTRY PROFILE AND OVERVIEW OF THE REGIONAL BACKGROUND

Niger's position - bordering south with Benin and Nigeria, east with Chad, north with Algeria and Libya, and west with Mali and Burkina Faso - and its vast territory make it a main point of transit along the Central Mediterranean Route, with migrants transiting from sub-Saharan to north Africa.<sup>11</sup> Its 1,267,000 sq meters make it one of the largest countries in West Africa, the sub-region with the largest migrant population: of the estimated 280 million migrants in 2020,<sup>12</sup> 25.4 million are in Africa,<sup>13</sup> with 7.6 million in West Africa alone.<sup>14</sup>

Niger hence witnesses multifold layers of mobility as a departure, transit, and destination country for people on the move. Permanent or seasonal labor migration to work in fields, mining sites, or urban areas which can offer jobs in construction or other economic opportunities is just one of them. Niger also sees many people departing or transiting from the rest of West and Central Africa on their way to Libya and Algeria, where they seek work or a way to eventually reach Europe. At the same time, Niger receives repatriations and expulsions from Algeria and Libya and witnesses several flows of asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing insecurity or natural hazards.<sup>15</sup>

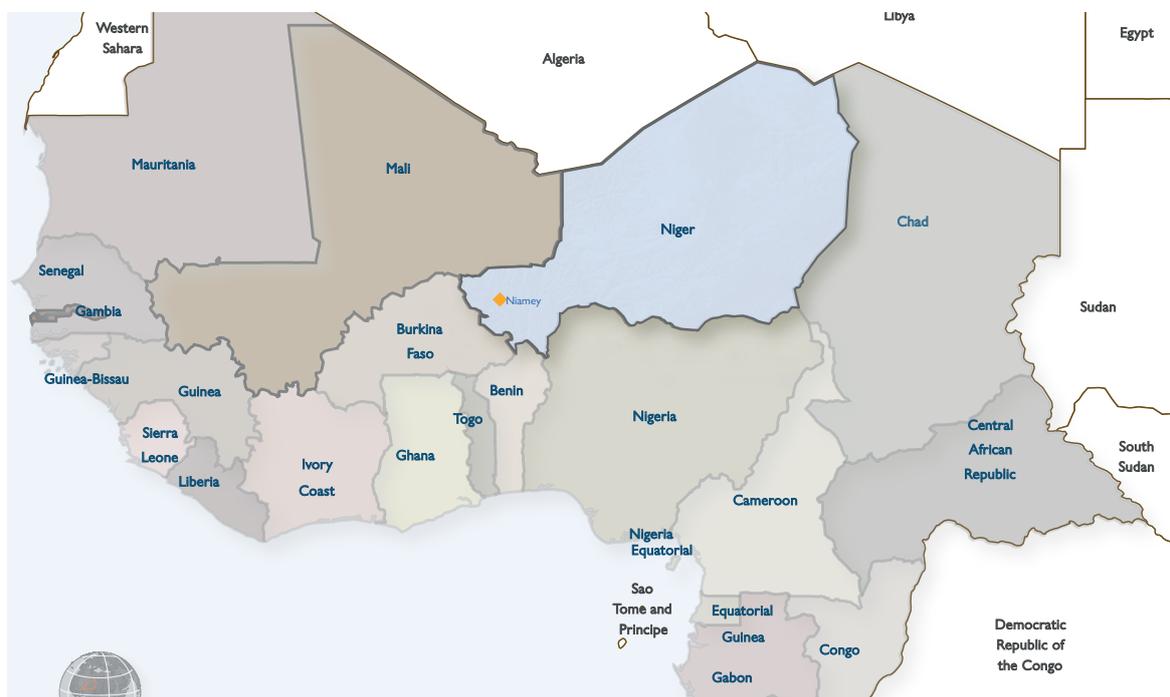


Figure 1: Map of West and Central Africa

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.

11 ANLTP-TIM. *Cartographie des Acteurs Intervenant dans le Domaine de la Traite des Personnes et du Trafic Illégitime de Migrants au Niger (2020)*  
IOM. *Migration Trends from, to, and within the Niger 2016-2019 (2020)*.

12 IOM Migration Data Portal. *Total number of international migrants at mid-year 2020*.

13 IOM Migration Data Portal. *Total number of international migrants at mid-year 2020*.

14 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). *International Migrant Stock, 2020*.

15 IOM. *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean (2020)*, Chapter 6: Overview of migration trends and patterns in the Republic of Niger 2016-2019, Lorelle Yuen, p. 77

Against this complex mobility background, multiple smuggling and trafficking routes cross the country, mostly converging in Agadez. Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants have been a growing cause of concern for several years in West Africa and the Sahel. These regions are witnessing significant demographic changes, with a rapidly growing, increasingly urban, and young population that is reshaping migration patterns.<sup>16</sup> Niger has one of the highest population growth rates worldwide (3,8%)<sup>17</sup> and the highest fertility rate (7,6 children per woman).<sup>18</sup> Against this background, in the last ten years movements changed due to increasing insecurity in the bordering countries, especially stemming from the Mali crisis and the Lake Chad Basin crisis, including the insurgencies of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Political instability and humanitarian crises in Libya, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire as well as economic difficulties further complicated by climate change have exacerbated insecurity and altered geopolitical dynamics as well as migratory patterns.<sup>19</sup>

Amidst conflict and crisis-weakened governance, the management of migratory flows is frail in the region, and this contributes to constantly reshaping migratory routes and spaces, favoring the thriving of mobility phenomena such as migrant smuggling and human trafficking, which affect Niger as a country of departure, transit, and destination. Despite the freedom of movements granted within the ECOWAS and most surrounding countries, smuggling remains a largely employed means of mobility, catering to people on the move with few or no means to travel through official and safer channels.

In this context, the adoption of legislation against the unlawful smuggling of migrants (Loi n° 2015-36 relative au trafic illicite de migrants) in 2015 by the Government of Niger, as well as stricter immigration policies adopted by Algeria, impacted the migration trends and routes previously following national roads across Niger.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the increase in patrols and security forces enforcing Law 2015-36 and punishments for smugglers or transporters led to the fragmentation of migration routes in order to elude controls, which disintegrated into numerous and frequently changing smaller, informal pathways.<sup>21</sup> This fragmentation renders it difficult for law enforcement actors to intercept migrants on their way to situations of exploitation, including migrants destined to trafficking rings or travelling through unsafe channels which can eventually lead and overlap with trafficking networks. Furthermore, criminal networks involved in the smuggling and trafficking of goods and persons continue to operate throughout West Africa alongside terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), and other Al Qaeda affiliates. These phenomena are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, as suggested by recent developments indicating that terrorist groups have begun to generate revenue for their activities through trafficking.<sup>22</sup>

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16 IOM. *A Practical Guide on Counter-Trafficking and Counter-Smuggling Mechanisms: a Compendium for Members of the Niamey Declaration* (2021), p.10

17 World Bank. *Data. Population Growth (%) - Niger*

18 World Bank. *Data. Fertility rate, total (births per woman)*.

19 IOM. *A Practical Guide on Counter-Trafficking and Counter-Smuggling Mechanisms: a Compendium for Members of the Niamey Declaration* (2021), p.10-11; IOM. *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean (2020)*, Chapter 6: Overview of migration trends and patterns in the Republic of Niger 2016-2019, Lorelle Yuen, p. 78

20 IOM. *Migration in West and North Central Africa and across the Mediterranean (2020)*, Chapter 6: Overview of migration trends and patterns in the Republic of Niger 2016-2019, Lorelle Yuen, p-78-79

21 *Ibid*, p. 79-80

22 IOM. *A Practical Guide on Counter-Trafficking and Counter-Smuggling Mechanisms: a Compendium for Members of the Niamey Declaration* (2021), p.10

The phenomenon of trafficking in persons is also aided by socio-anthropological and cultural factors. The perception of what represents human trafficking does not consistently correspond to the reality of this crime: i.e., what could be clearly defined as human trafficking from a legal and humanitarian standpoint can often be an integral part or the inevitable result of social and cultural norms that are engrained in a given context. For many families, sending someone off into the world through channels that appear or might become unsafe is perceived as a necessary rite of passage, albeit risky, for the youth who are expected to emigrate to find opportunities to provide for themselves and their families. Whenever this ends up in exploitation, it is not necessarily recognized as a specific crime for which justice and assistance can be sought – for some, it is just a failed attempt.

For others, the recruitment of their child by a third person - not necessarily a trusted acquaintance - who will find them some sort of employment is the norm, even though families are often aware of the undignified living and working conditions awaiting their children.

This should not be necessarily interpreted as malicious complicity. It should be considered that the potential risks and impact of these situations on the victims of trafficking might not be fully understood by the families and communities who enable this - or that even when understood, the alternative of having yet another family member to feed can be more daunting than the thought of encouraging departure, albeit unsafe.

## **POLITICAL, LEGAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK REGARDING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS**

At the national level, Niger is party to the most relevant international and regional human rights treaties relating to or including provisions for human trafficking.

The GoN signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000), which protects children from their sale, engagement in forced labour, exploitation for organ harvesting and transfer, sexual exploitation, and exploitation for pornography.

Niger is also party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and the Members of their Families (1990), which provides that migrant workers and members of their families shall not be held in slavery or servitude nor engaged in forced or compulsory labour.

Niger also signed and ratified the key human rights instruments addressing specifically human trafficking, i.e., the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) and its Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (known as the Palermo Protocol, 2000). The Palermo Protocol calls on states to adopt measures to criminalize human trafficking and outlines responsibilities for states to establish measures for the prevention of human trafficking and the protection of victims. In 2000, Niger also ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, Convention 182 of the International Labour Organization (1999), which apply to all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery including, inter alia, the sale or trafficking of children.

At the regional level, Niger is party to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981), which prohibits all forms of exploitation and degradation of human beings, including slavery and inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), which inter alia protects children from all forms of economic exploitation and performance of any work interfering with their spiritual, mental, physical, moral, or social development.

In 2001, Niger adhered to the ECOWAS Declaration on the Fight against Trafficking in Persons, which called for commitments at the sub-regional level and adopted the first ECOWAS Action Plan (2002-2003) on this issue.

Many Western African and Sahel states devised plans of actions against trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. The first ECOWAS Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons in particular had a significant impact on the development of national policies. Later, ECOWAS and ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) Member States joined forces to adopt a bi-regional Plan of Action to combat human trafficking for 2006-2008. Additionally, the ECOWAS Gender and Migration Framework and the Plan of Action for 2015-2020 also addressed the need to develop protection and assistance systems for victims of human trafficking. Meanwhile, in 2017, the G5 Sahel countries (Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Chad) launched a cross-border joint force with the aim, inter alia, to fight human trafficking in the region. Finally, in 2018 efforts extended beyond the region with the adoption of the Niamey Declaration to enhance coordination amongst countries of origin, transit, and destination, alongside IOM, UNHCR, and UNODC. The process was facilitated by the Government of Niger and gathered 18 major origin, transit, and destination West African and European countries for human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants.<sup>23</sup>

Niger's commitments in international human rights law and at the regional and interregional level translated into concrete efforts at the country level with the establishment of a dedicated framework for action. In 2010, Niger approved Ordonnance 2010-86<sup>24</sup> relating to the fight against human trafficking.

The Ordonnance<sup>25</sup> addressed the prevention and the fight against human trafficking, particularly for women and children; the protection and assistance of victims in respect of their fundamental rights; the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators; and the facilitation of cooperation among state parties to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Additional Protocol. Ordonnance 2010-86 established the National Commission for the Coordination for Combating Human Trafficking (CNCLTP) and the National Agency for Combating Human Trafficking (ANLTP/TIM), the key structures at the domestic level entrusted with preventing and combatting human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants.

Two decrees followed in 2012: Decree 2012-082, which operationalized the CNCLTP-TIM, the body entrusted with policy and program design; and Decree 2012-83, which operationalized the ANLTP-TIM, the body responsible for implementation of all related activities. The CNLTP-TIM is a multi-disciplinary commission and brings together representatives of multiple ministries in the definition and planning of the country's counter-trafficking response. The enactment of the counter-trafficking agenda is subsequently entrusted to the ANLTP-TIM, an independent agency under the Ministry of Justice.

Then, in 2014, Niger adopted a five-year National Action Plan for the Fight Against Human Trafficking for 2014-2018. The Action Plan envisioned, inter alia, the establishment of a referral system for the protection and assistance of VoT and the realization of a mapping of all the stakeholders engaged in the fight against human trafficking and victim assistance and protection.<sup>26</sup> The National Referral Mechanism, which outlines the guideline for identification, referral, and care of VoT in full respect of their rights under national and international legal instruments, was established under the umbrella of the ANLTP/TIM. Thanks to the referral framework, better coordination and monitoring of countertrafficking efforts in the country can be ensured and the engagement of relevant actors with service providers is supported.

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23 IOM. *A Practical Guide on Counter-Trafficking and Counter-Smuggling Mechanisms: a Compendium for Members of the Niamey Declaration (2021)*

24 Ordonnance n° 2010-86 du 16 décembre 2010 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes.

25 An order issued by the Government.

26 Government of Niger. *Plan d'Action National de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes (2014-2018)*.

In 2015, the GoN instituted the National Day of Mobilization against Human Trafficking, which has since been an outstanding opportunity to sensitize the public on human trafficking issues and conduct mass communication with the most vulnerable populations.

In the following years, the legal framework for creating and running shelters for victims of trafficking in Niger was also laid out, leading to the opening of the first state-run shelter for VoT in the country, in Zinder. In 2018, Niger adopted Decree 2018-429/PRN/MJ<sup>27</sup> of 22 June 2018 pertaining to the Modalities of Creation, Functioning, Financing, and Monitoring of the Shelter for Victims of Trafficking in Persons. In 2019, the Decision 000034/MJ/GS/DG/ANLTP/TIM pertaining to the Creation of a Shelter for Victims of Trafficking in Persons in Zinder<sup>28</sup> finalized the administrative existence of the shelter and allowed for its opening and permitted the establishment of a Compensation Fund for Victims. The supporting role of IOM was instrumental for the abovementioned achievements.



IOM's community mobilisers visit migrants' shelters in Agadez. IOM 2020/Monica Chiriac

27 in French Décret déterminant les modalités de création, de fonctionnement, de financement et d'inspection des Centres d'Accueil et de protection des Victimes de la traite des personnes, adopted on 22 June 2018.

28 in French: Arrêté portant Création des Centres d'accueil et de protection des victimes de traite personnes à Zinder, adopted on 12 March 2019.



# 3 OVERVIEW OF IOM'S INVOLVEMENT IN NIGER AND IN COUNTER-TRAFFICKING

IOM has been active in Niger since 2006 to assist vulnerable populations and contribute to the protection of the rights of migrants. In particular, it has engaged in protection from human trafficking in Niger for over a decade, with an approach which revolves around different axes.<sup>29</sup>

On one hand, IOM seeks to strengthen the national response to human trafficking. IOM Niger has been instrumental in helping the Government of Niger to achieve commitments set forth by the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (2014-2018). The support provided enabled the state to advance towards the achievement of all its strategic objectives: improving the legal and institutional system; strengthening mechanisms for the prevention of trafficking; promoting assistance and care for VoT; intensifying prosecution; and strengthening cooperation and partnership. To achieve this, IOM has provided structural support to the establishment of state-run facilities where victims can receive the assistance they need; facilitated the capacity-building of law enforcement, governmental, and civil society actors to ensure the enhancement of their migration management capacities; assisted the formulation of national frameworks to promote a coordinated and strategic response to the issue of human trafficking; and strengthened the tools available to national actors for their response.

On the other hand, IOM plays a key role in the protection of VoT and prevention of human trafficking both inside its transit centers, where it provides comprehensive assistance to migrants who fell victim to human trafficking; and outside, where it engages with the communities to inform populations on the dangers of irregular migration and to ensure that VoT are aware of the services which are available to them.

## STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL RESPONSE

In 2017 IOM signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for bilateral cooperation with the ANLTP / TIM, the designated agency for the fight against human trafficking in Niger. This MoU laid the groundwork for the elaboration and launch of the National Referral Mechanism for VoT in Niger by the ANLTP-TIM and, in complementarity, the realization of a Mapping of Actors involved in the Fight Against Human Trafficking in Niger - as set out in the

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<sup>29</sup> The engagement of IOM highlighted in this section has been made possible through the generous support of multiple donors in the context of the following projects, *inter alia*:

*Enhance the government of Niger capacities to implement anti-trafficking legislation and to promote the protection of victims (2010-2015) and Enhancing capacities to fight trafficking in persons (TiP) in Niger (2018-2020), both funded by the US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons; Prevention of human trafficking through women empowerment and assistance to Victims of Trafficking in the Zinder region in 2015-2016, funded by the Government of Canada; Direct Assistance to Returned Migrants and Victims of Trafficking in Niger (RDPP) - Phase II (2021-2021), funded by the Ministry of Interior of the Government of Italy; Enhancing cross-border cooperation on border management and counter-trafficking between Niger and Nigeria (2019-2024), funded by the Government of the United Kingdom; Mécanisme de Ressource et Réponse pour les Migrants (MRRM) – Phase I and II, financed by the European Union (2015-present); Assistance to Nigerien returnees in Agadez and Zinder (ANRAZ), (2017-2019) funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police and State Secretariat for Migration; Strengthening communication, cooperation and information management along the border with Nigeria for effective and participative border management in Niger (2019-2021), funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Italy; Empowering the Niger Border Police (Directorate of Territorial Surveillance) Headquarters and Regional Partners (2018-2020) funded by the US Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs; Cooperation on Migration and Partnerships to Achieve Sustainable Solutions (COMPASS) funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Netherlands, (2021-2023); Prevention of human trafficking through women empowerment and assistance to victims of trafficking in Zinder region (2015-2016), funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development of Canada; Appui au renforcement de la gestion de la migration au Niger, Phases I and II, funded by DANIDA (2017-2022). Migrants assistance in Agadez region (MIRAA) Phases I, II, and III – funded by the Government of the Netherlands (2016-2021); Assistance to Vulnerable and Exposed Migrants in Niger (AVENIR) funded by the Italian Migration Fund (2021-2022); EU-IOM Joint Initiative for migrants protection and reintegration, funded by the European Union Trust Fund (2017-2022); Protection and Assistance to Children and Vulnerable Migrants Returning from Algeria to Niger (PACMAN), funded by the Italian Migration Fund (2021-2021).*

five-year National Action Plan. Both tools, supported by IOM, were published in 2020 and are crucial to improve orchestrate human trafficking efforts in the country, as they clarify the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each stakeholder.

## PROTECTION

IOM and the ANLTP-TIM worked together to operationalize three decentralized offices of the ANLTP-TIM in the towns of Zinder, Koni and Diffa. Support to these offices from IOM enabled ANLTP-TIM to advance its national strategy to achieve operational presence of the agency in all eight regions of Niger, which facilitates its interventions to prevent and combat human trafficking all across the country while prosecuting perpetrators.

The most prominent achievement in the context of the collaboration with the ANLTP-TIM, however, was the establishment of the first state-run center for victims of trafficking in Zinder, inaugurated in 2019. The shelter, rehabilitated thanks to a project intervention, is managed by the ANLTP-TIM with the collaboration of health, justice, police, and child protection authorities and offers direct, comprehensive assistance to VoT. Support had been given for its equipment (offices, dormitory, child friendly space, psychosocial activities, medical equipment, and so on) and for the management and running of the shelter (through initial training and regular staff capacities reinforcement sessions and support to the shelter management committee inter alia). IOM also facilitated study visits for the staff of the Zinder shelter to the Agadez and Niamey transit centers to reinforce the quality of assistance and the functioning of the shelter, seeking to transfer IOM's experience running centers and assisting victims in Niger as well as its global expertise in VoT shelter management.<sup>30</sup>

Support to state-run facilities that can ensure the direct assistance of vulnerable individuals goes beyond the Zinder shelter. IOM has supported the establishment, equipment and functioning of a Centre for Prevention, Promotion and Protection (CEPPP) for children in Kantché – an area witnessing large waves of outbound migration. The CEPPPs are an integral part of the MPFPEs community-based protection strategy, based in several areas across Niger and supported by multiple actors.

The centers receive, refer and follow up on cases of unaccompanied or separated children as well as child victims of abuse and neglect, providing also direct assistance through counselling sessions with parents, psychosocial support, home visits, returns to family and the reintegration of children in their community of origin.

In coordination with UNICEF, IOM assisted the GoN in ensuring increased CEPPP presence in the Zinder region through the opening of another center in Kantché. The social workers of CEPPP, established under the authority of the MPFPE, acknowledged that now the center represents a proper local protection center for a community which, before the center opened, had to rely on assistance provided by an office within the prefecture. According to the MPFPE representatives interviewed for this research, this association with the police environment hindered people in Kantché from reaching out to the center, as they were reluctant to seek assistance linked with law enforcement actors, and the impact of IOM in supporting the establishment of a standalone structure was invaluable. The existence of a center also allows the social workers to focus specifically on the cases of children on the move. Finally, the existence of CEPPP benefits the whole community of Zinder by informing migrants of the risks of irregular migration.

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<sup>30</sup> See more on IOM's expertise in IOM. *The Handbook on Direct Assistance to Victims of Trafficking* (2015)

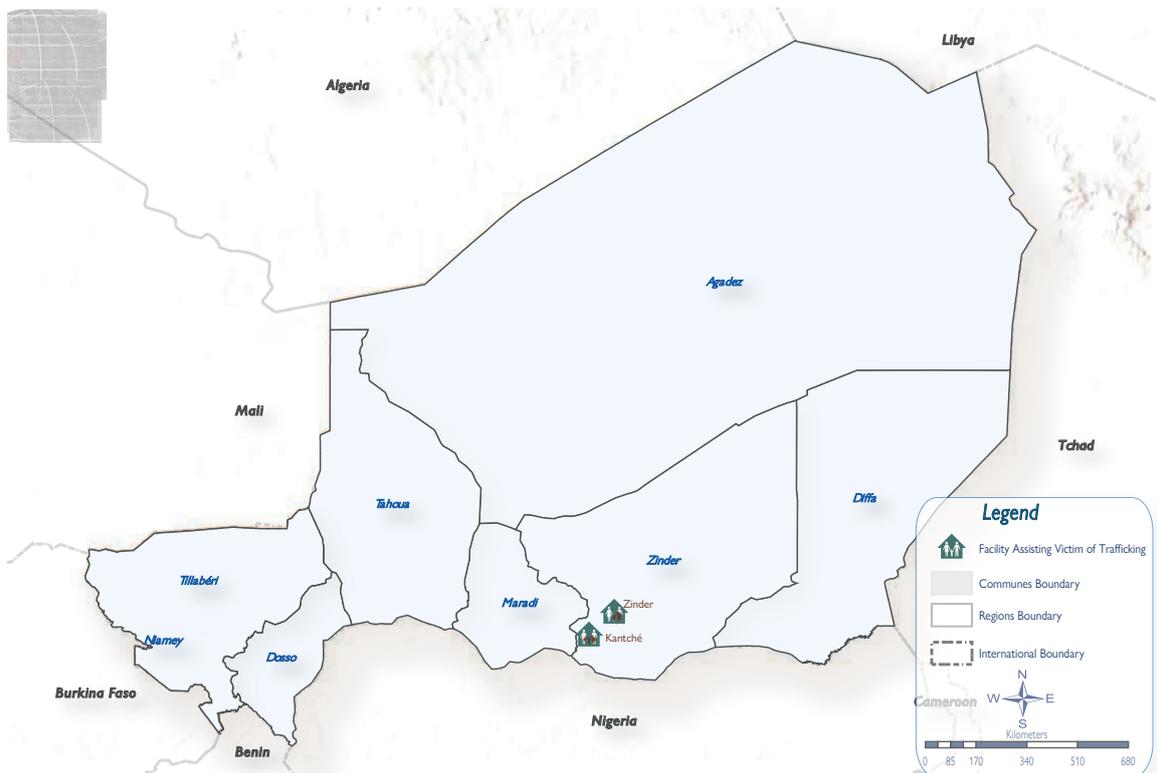


Figure 2: State-run facilities assisting Victims of Trafficking in Niger

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.

## PREVENTION

The assistance provided at the shelter and CEPPP level complements prevention efforts led through several different formats of awareness activities. For instance, IOM assisted the development of a communication strategy for children in Kantché, addressing human trafficking inter alia, and which is now employed by actors in Kantché, in particular the MPFPE, for all sensibilization activities. IOM also successfully supported media campaigns which covered several human trafficking risks and awareness events in both rural and urban areas, targeting in particular the regions of Maradi, Zinder, and Tahoua in French as well as the local languages Hausa and Zarma, to support broader reach among the population through radio and TV channels. Awareness activities have targeted rural areas in strategic positions on migration routes, including through sensitization caravan and the distribution of flyers to raise awareness on human trafficking both for migrants (actual or potential victims).

Local communities in border regions have also been engaged in the prevention of human trafficking and in the identification of victims, including through sensitization events for cultural and religious leaders and local protection groups.



## CAPACITY-BUILDING

However, knowledge-building reaches beyond the communities: enhancing the capacities of governmental and civil society actors involved in the fight against trafficking, as well as first-line actors and its own staff working closely with the communities, is an integral part of IOM's strategy to combat human trafficking. These capacity-building efforts are part of a larger cooperation framework with the GoN on this component, complementing initiatives of other actors – e.g., UNODC and EUCAP Sahel – working alongside state actors.

Numerous trainings are regularly rolled out, for instance through the Training Modules on the Protection of Victims of Trafficking, adapted from IOM materials to the Nigerien context in order to provide a framework for strengthening the capacities of judges, prosecutors, law enforcement, social workers, and diplomatic functionaries of Niger abroad for an improved protection of victims of trafficking and prosecution of traffickers and investigation of human trafficking cases.

IOM built and strengthened the capacities of different actors involved in work related to human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants in Niger. This included court representatives such as public prosecutors and investigative judges acting as focal points of the ANLTP/TIM; inspectors of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Protection; and newly recruited officers of the ANLTP/TIM. The capacity building ensured that state representatives were familiar with essential concepts of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants and prepared to identify, refer, and assist vulnerable cases.

Additionally, IOM collaborated with UNICEF to assist the GoN in improving its migration management capacities, training representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry for Women Promotion and Child Protection on migration management including better understanding of migration flows, child protection and the related legal framework and SOPs, and the issues of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. This type of intervention sought to promote national strategies in meeting the needs of migrants in vulnerable situations by building the capacity of state actors dealing with children on the move including on trafficking in persons, child protection, coordination, and legal frameworks. For many of the targeted national child protection actors, this

type of training addressing protection-related issues in the context of migration was unprecedented; not only it effectively built the capacity of national actors and raised their awareness on the issue of trafficking, yet it also strengthened the relationship between ministerial actors and IOM and underlined the need to coordinate for an efficient and effective response to human trafficking.

Furthermore, IOM seeks to train frontline actors such as border agents and law enforcement actors to ensure that border management and monitoring of cross-border crime is human-rights and victim-centered, avoiding the criminalization of VoTs by promptly identifying vulnerable migrants and ensuring that investigations to ascertain the status of a migrant who is not compliant with exit/entry requirements is carried out in full respect of their vulnerability. Finally, IOM trains its community mobilisers in Agadez and Niamey to ensure that they would adequately provide basic response and referral for VoT. As one community mobiliser confirmed: “It was a challenge before to detect all vulnerable migrant; but thanks to the trainings, there is no victim left unidentified”.

Having a comprehensive overview of trafficking trends in Niger is crucial to better develop a contextualized response. For instance, IOM assisted the ANLTP-TIM in the collection of data related to human trafficking, working together on the methodology and supporting the deployment of enumerators across the country which eventually led to the elaboration of reports aimed at advancing programming and advocacy around trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, in collaboration with UNODC. At the same time, IOM developed in 2009 the Migration Information and Data Management System (MIDAS), which enables the collection of reliable entry and exit travelers' data at borders. MIDAS, installed at various strategic border posts and at the central level, provides a critical mass of data that can be connected to systems monitoring transnational crime and contributes to enhancing a larger network of crime prevention, including human trafficking. MIDAS enables border agents to detect fraudulent travel documents, travelers listed on national or international alert lists as well as those not complying with exit/entry requirements or without papers, who might be smuggled or trafficked.

## COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Finally, IOM seeks to enhance coordination among all actors involved, particularly between border authorities and protection actors such as the ANLTP-TIM to which VoT identified during border controls are referred for assistance. The focus on cooperation is what propelled the Development of the Practical Guide on Existing Mechanisms to Counter-Trafficking and Counter-Smuggling in close collaboration with UNODC and the signatory Member states of the Niamey Declaration, which maps the existing counter-trafficking mechanisms and structures, administrative and reporting channels. In the context of this process, IOM organized the virtual regional conference “Combating trafficking of persons and migrant smuggling through better internal and regional cooperation on protection and border management” to facilitate the discussion of internal and regional coordination and cooperation to combat THB and SoM and facilitate the implementation of recommendations of the Niamey Declaration.

## PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

The Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) has played a fundamental role in the efforts of IOM against human trafficking. The MRRM, established in 2015, consists of several initiatives contributing to the same objective, i.e., promoting a dignified and secure migration for all and supporting governmental efforts in developing an effective approach to migration flows, in line with the mandate of the IOM. The MRRM aims to provide direct assistance to migrants in transit and carries out activities to promote viable alternatives to migration, to inform individuals about safe migration and to encourage activities which ensure that migrants can contribute to the economy in their country of origin. In this context, multiple projects have been implemented by IOM Niger under the MRRM both directly with the provision of direct assistance and institutionally by strengthening the capacity of the GoN to cater for the needs of vulnerable migrants including VoT.

IOM provides direct assistance to migrants in its six transit centers and facilitates voluntary return for migrants who wish to go back to their country of origin. The transit centers are located in Arlit, Dirkou, Agadez, and Niamey, where three centers alone are open. Case workers are working in Arlit, Agadez, and Niamey transit centers, while in Dirkou operations staff are also trained on human trafficking and protection.

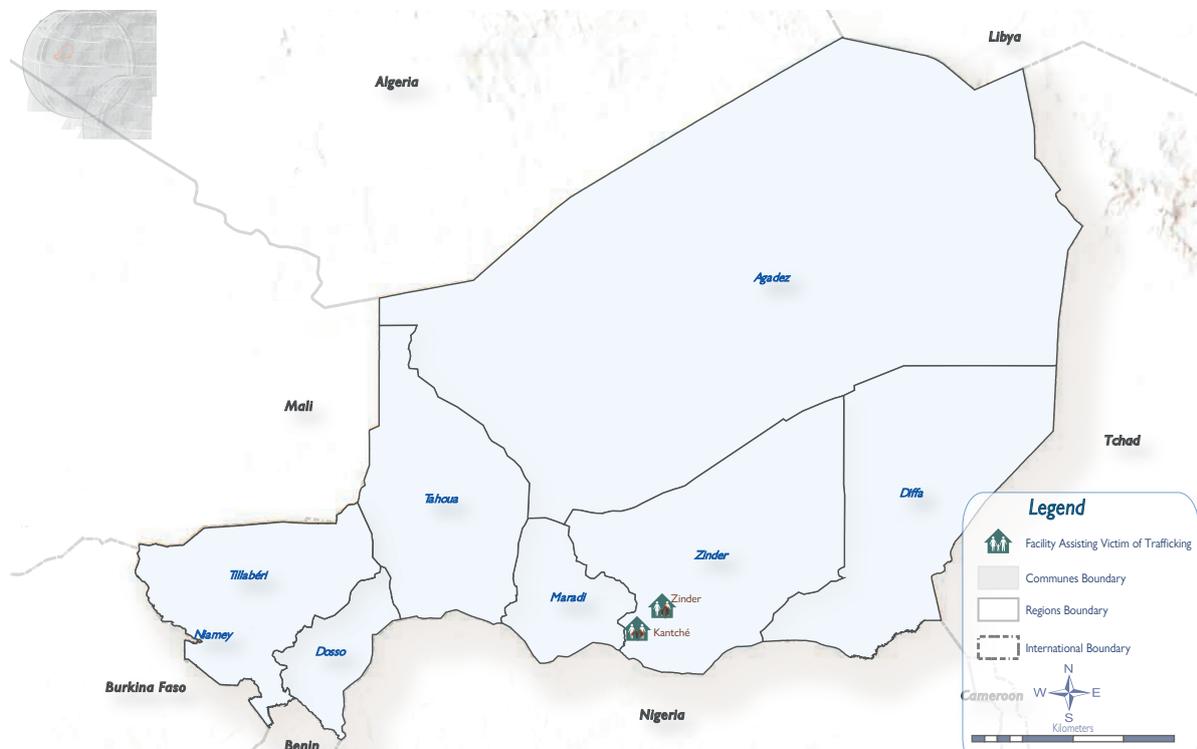


Figure 3: IOM Transit Centers assisting Victims of Trafficking in Niger

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.

Most victims of trafficking are identified after registration, through interviews in which staff collects information on the migrant. Whenever interviews do not lead to a clear conclusion, direct observation of behaviors (e.g., self-isolation) during recreational or therapeutic activities offered at the centers can allow protection or MHPSS staff to identify a victim of trafficking. Once the migrant is identified as a VoT, a needs assessment is conducted to ensure that the appropriate assistance (e.g., medical, psychosocial, reestablishment of family ties, access to justice) is provided.

If the VoT is an unaccompanied child, the protection assistant will work closely with the judge of minors for their best interest evaluation and find the best sustainable solution once the family retracing and the evaluation of its environment of origin are completed. IOM coordinates with the country of origin to find and assess the family in order to evaluate whether return to the family is indeed in the best interest of the child.

It can be necessary for IOM to communicate extensively with families to explain what happened to their children and facilitate return. It can also happen that families refuse to welcome back their children and instead insist that they should remain abroad to try to earn money for the family, even once they are aware of what happened to their child or what could happen again. In cases where return to the family is deemed unsafe, IOM collaborates with state actors and NGOs to ensure that the children receive shelter and care elsewhere (with another member of the extended family; in a host family; or in a facility for children either in Niger or in their country of origin).

All transit centers have infirmaries operating 24/7 while psychologists, psychosocial assistants, and mental health technicians work across most transit centers as well as volunteers from the Nigerien Red Cross who are mobilized in case the VoT needs constant individual care for protection or medical reasons. Focus groups, art therapy, psychosocial and recreational activities, and individual consultations are organized in the transit centers. IOM also proposes activities outside of the transit centers, such as outings to the museum, the cinema, or cultural centers. Individual and collective discussions help the victims recover their mental wellbeing before returning to their community. Victims who experience more severe mental health conditions are referred to a hospital offering psychiatric care.

Since 2021, the National Agency for Judiciary and Legal Assistance (Agence Nationale de l'Assistance Juridique et Judiciaire) visits each transit center to sensitize migrants, including VoT, about their rights and all the necessary steps to access and seek justice if desired. The ANAJJ offers free legal and judiciary assistance for all minors and vulnerable migrants.

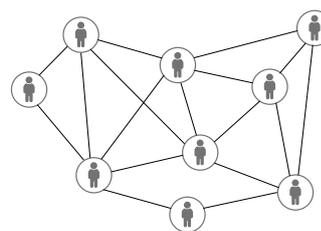
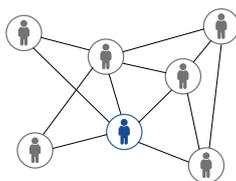
In IOM's experience, victims are rarely interested in pursuing legal complaint mechanisms. For many the process is perceived as pointless because their traffickers are outside Niger, or they may be fearing reprisals from their traffickers. Many victims do not seek justice as they just wish to return home and leave this traumatic experience behind and cooperating in legal proceedings is perceived as delaying their return and therefore their chances to start a new life. However, interviews revealed that some victims go back to their country of origin with the intention of starting legal proceedings against the acquaintance or friend who connected them to the trafficking networks. It should also be noted that since the beginning of IOM's collaboration with ANAJJ begun and ANAJJ started activities to inform victims of their rights and options, in 2021 four victims in Niger commenced proceedings with ANAJJ's legal assistance.

For victims who wish to engage in Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR), a risk evaluation is conducted by the case worker in collaboration with the country of origin to ensure that the return poses no security problem to the victim or his/her family. Once back in their country of origin, support for the reintegration of VoTs into their community is essential to ensure the sustainability of returns. Depending on personal needs, skills and aspirations, as well as funding availability, reintegration assistance can include medical assistance, psychosocial support, coverage of education fees, vocational training, assistance with issuance of civil state documents, the set-up of an income-generating activity, and/or housing and other basic needs of the returnees. The aim of these activities is to promote sustainable development, help migrants reintegrate into their country and community of origin through personalized support, and mitigate the risks that migrants face during their migratory journey and their return, including the risk of re-trafficking.

Upon return, VoTs can have access to various reintegration assistance options. IOM's socio-economic support includes individual, collective or community-based reintegration projects.<sup>31</sup>

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31 See IOM. *Reintegration Handbook: Practical Guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance*. (2019)



### Collective Reintegration

### Individual Reintegration

### Community Reintegration

- **Individual reintegration** targets VoT who are particularly vulnerable, such as unaccompanied children. Based on the returnee's profile of skills and experience, IOM offers individualized support that allows them to start a small economic project and/or pursue vocational training in order to reintegrate into the local labor market.
- **Collective reintegration** is designed for a group of VoTs, usually from the same community, who wish to carry out the same activity. For example, a group of VoT may decide to start or run a small business by pooling their resources together.
- **Community-based reintegration** projects are normally business initiatives gathering both migrants and members of the community, aiming to help migrants reintegrate themselves into society while also addressing the needs of the communities of origin witnessing significant migration flows and fostering social cohesion around a shared goal.

In addition, if the victim needs medical or psychological assistance, treatment plans are handed over to the counterparts of the country of origin for their follow-up and continuation of services. The case management is based on individual needs.

For Nigerien nationals identified outside of the country, IOM Niger coordinates with the country of identification. The risk evaluation is done by the other country and is validated by protection staff in Niger. For most vulnerable cases (e.g., VoTs with mental health support needs or children), IOM works closely with the DRPE to retrace the family, reestablish family links, and evaluate the family, the protection and risk factors to ensure that returning to the village of origin is safe and in her best interest. All most vulnerable VoTs are escorted by a state social worker to their village of origin and reunited with their family.

Due to the nature of its programs, IOM Niger assists primarily TCNs in its transit centers. Nevertheless, IOM supports the GoN and in particular the ANLTP-TIM in ensuring that Nigerien victims of trafficking can also access services and assistance according to their needs.

## THE GOVERNMENT-RUN SHELTER IN ZINDER

Nigerien VoTs can access different services in the national shelter in Zinder, run by ANLTP-TIM in coordination with the relevant ministries.

Established through the decree no° 2018-429/PRN/MJ of 22 June 2018 with a view to ensuring adequate support and protection for victims, on 18 July 2019 the shelter in Zinder was officially inaugurated by the National Agency for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (ANLTP-TIM) with the support of IOM. Assisted by IOM, the shelter management developed its internal operational framework and rehabilitated its infrastructures. The shelter has two separated dormitories, bathrooms, an administrative office, a child-friendly space, a kitchen and a diner room, and a large playground. It is equipped with games and sport material for psychosocial activities and stocked with medicines and medical equipment for the nurse. Dignity kits, food, and water are distributed to the VoTs. A nursery is also under construction.

State agents from different ministries (Justice, Public Health, Women Promotion and Child Protection, Defense) provide assistance whenever VoTs are referred to the center, while the national NGO CADEL is ensuring the reintegration of Nigerian VoTs assisted in the shelter.

A shelter committee gathering civil society organizations (CSOs) and all state actors concerned has been established and is supported in the organization of quarterly meetings.



In addition to the daily running of the shelter, the committee implements sensitization activities to raise awareness on the existence of the center and its role, as well as the risks of irregular migration or harmful cultural practices (such as *location d'enfant*) in the Zinder region for the prevention of THB at the community-level.

Thanks to different training sessions organized by IOM with the ANLPT/TIM across all regions on the identification of VoT and the application of the National Referral Mechanism, the number of people who could be directed to the center and provided with assistance increased considerably. In the first year after its opening, 7 VoTs had been assisted. In the second year, the number rose to 96 victims; in 2021, the shelter assisted over a hundred people (until August 2021).

The last satisfaction survey revealed that 100 % of VoT were globally satisfied: they felt safe in the shelter and appreciated the quality of the assistance and staff.

So far, the shelter has been only supported by IOM thanks to multiple donors (inter alia, the Governments of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Italy, and Korea).

Following this successful experience, ANLTP-TIM is now willing to open a second shelter for victims of trafficking in Niger in order to cover a wider territory, otherwise left without accessible services for VoT.

In the meantime, IOM developed a flexible assistance mechanism through a special fund to assist VoT identified in remote areas by local partners including law enforcement actors, social workers, and CSOs, and offer them immediate shelter, food and water assistance before transferring them to the national shelter or to IOM transit centers.



## IOM'S CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AGENDAS

Efforts conducted against human trafficking in Niger not only seek to advance national strategic priorities but also contribute meaningfully to global commitments made by IOM to promote safe, orderly and dignified migration for all.

Above all, the collaboration between the Government of Niger and IOM Niger contributes directly to the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), working towards the achievement of Objective 10: Prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration.<sup>32</sup>

As outlined in GCM commitments, IOM seeks to strengthen capacities and international cooperation to enhance the identification and protection of, and assistance to, migrants who have become victims of trafficking – with special attention to women and children. The work of IOM and the GoN specifically fulfills the commitments of the GCM to provide migrants with comprehensive assistance and to enhance the awareness and capacities of populations, public officials, and law enforcement officers with a view of facilitating the prevention and identification of human trafficking.

Furthermore, the work of IOM and its partners around human trafficking contributes directly to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>33</sup>

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32 United Nations. *Global Compact for Migration* (2018).

33 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The 17 Goals*. Available from: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

**5** GENDER EQUALITY



**SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

*Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.*

**SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.**

*Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.*

**16** PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



The work of IOM on human trafficking is also an essential component of its Crisis Response Plan for Niger 2022.<sup>34</sup> Among the key priorities identified in its Crisis Response Plan for 2022, there was to Save lives and respond to needs through humanitarian assistance and protection, to which IOM contributes by providing protection assistance and individualized case management to victims of trafficking and movement assistance to whom need assisted voluntary return to their country of origin.



Reception of 460 Nigerien returnees. Photo: IOM/Monica Chiriac

<sup>34</sup> IOM. Niger Crisis Response Plan 2022. Available from: <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/niger-crisis-response-plan-2022/year/2022#:~:text=IOM%20will%20continue%20to%20provide,25%20per%20cent%20cash%20assistance.>



IOM assisting migrants returning from Algeria. Photo: IOM/Monica Chiriac

# 4 HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN NIGER

## LIMITATION IN AVAILABILITY OF DATA

The data analysis in the following section represents largely third country nationals (TCNs) due to the nature of the assistance program offered by IOM. Therefore, the research and analysis are a reflection of trafficking trends and phenomena captured in Niger or passing through Niger, while it cannot determine accurately the prevalence of VoT who are nationals of Niger.

Furthermore, the dataset regarding cases managed in the Zinder shelter did not necessarily provide the same level of details on stories of VoT as the case management is conducted by national partners.

Likewise, the level of detail on cases was not consistent across different datasets, hence details e.g., on the destination of exploitation or the site of exploitation were not frequently recorded. This prevented the extraction of sufficient data for quantitative analysis on certain types of information. However, qualitative interviews with key informants enabled to confirm potential trends or compensate to the lack of information from the databases.

Finally, some difficulties due to an overlap among forms of exploitation were observed. This refers particularly to the figures for exploitation in domestic labor or intended exploitation in domestic labor, which are likely to be significantly higher. This is because the figures should include a larger number of women and girls who were instead recorded in the database as victims of labor exploitation which, in the case of the female victims assisted, usually referred to domestic work in particular.

## MAIN VICTIM PROFILES AND TRENDS OBSERVED

Between January 2017 and July 2021, a total of 565 victims of trafficking were assisted in the centers ran by IOM in Agadez, Arlit, Dirkou, and Niamey; the government-run center in Zinder; and outside the centers. 397 cases were assisted in IOM centers while 168 victims of trafficking were received in the government-run center. The point of entry into assistance for most victims was Zinder, followed by Agadez, Arlit, Dirkou, and Niamey.

## PROFILE OF VICTIMS

Human trafficking in Niger is a gendered issue affecting disproportionately women and girls.

The majority of victims were women and girls, who represented 69% of cases analyzed against the 31% represented by men and boys.

The age of victims ranged from 4 months to 66 years old; both the average and median age were 20.

Victims were mostly adults: 62% of victims were 18 and over with an average age of 26. The remaining 37% of victims were under 18 years old with an average age of 10.5.<sup>35</sup>

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35 1% of cases showed no recorded age

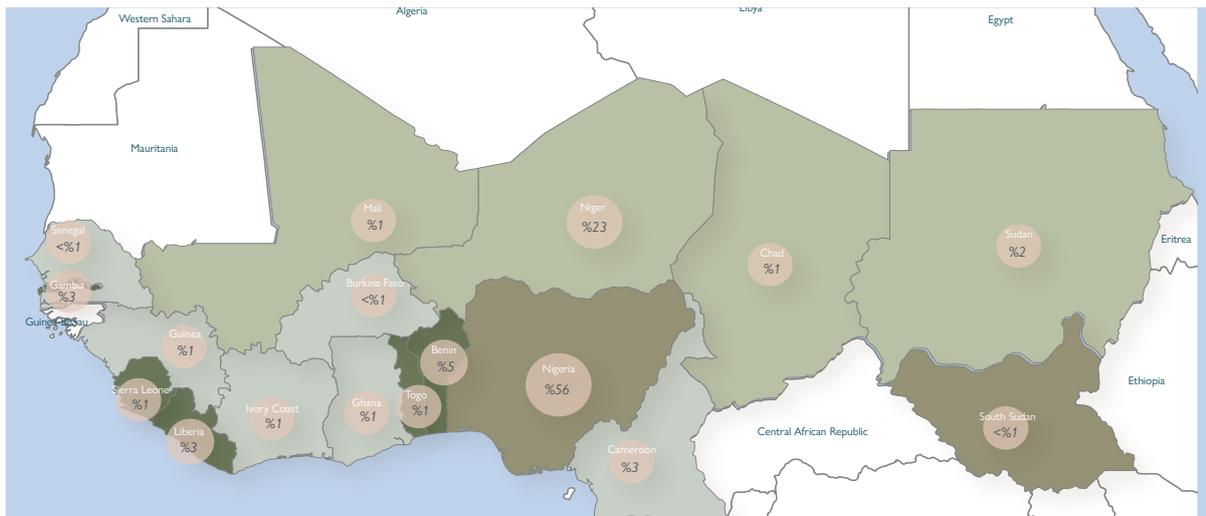


Figure 4: Countries of origin of Victims of Trafficking assisted

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.

The overwhelming majority of victims were from Nigeria (56%) and Niger (23%). Other countries of origin included Benin (5%), Liberia (3%), Cameroon (2%), The Gambia (2%), and Sudan (2%); Chad (1%), Côte d'Ivoire (1%), Ghana (1%), Guinea Conakry (1%), Mali (1%), Sierra Leone (1%), and Togo (1%); and Burkina Faso (<1%), Senegal (<1%), and Sud Sudan (<1%).

Areas and cities from where victims departed included:

- Benin: Djougou, Cotonou, Porto Novo
- Burkina Faso: Ouagadougou
- Cameroon: Douala, Yaoundé, Mbalmayo
- Chad: N'djamena, Moundou
- Côte d'Ivoire: Abidjan, Bouake, Daloa
- The Gambia: Banjul, Bakoteh-Serrekunda, Basse
- Ghana: Accra, Nananie
- Guinea Conakry: Conakry, Dabola, Mamou
- Liberia: Monrovia, Lofa County, Zwedru, Zorzor, Nema Town
- Mali: Gao, Koulikoro
- Niger: Zinder region (Matamèye, Magaria, Koundoumaoua, Tchédia, Kantché, Kourni); Maradi (Korgom); Niamey, Agadez, Tahoua, Tessaoua (Maradi).
- Nigeria: Lagos, Edo State, Delta State, the Sokoto area.
- Senegal: Dakar
- Sierra Leone: Freetown, Waterloo, Port-Loko
- South Sudan: Rumbek
- Sudan: Darfur, Nyala, Khartoum
- Togo: Lomé, Sokodé.

Forms of trafficking detected were multifold: most frequent purposes of trafficking were:

- sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, and intended sexual exploitation (38%)
- labor exploitation, forced labor and intended labor exploitation (21%)
- exploitation in begging (23%)

followed by exploitation for domestic labor and intended exploitation for domestic labor (4%); slavery (1%); cases of exploitation or intended exploitation for multiple purposes: combinations of forced labor, sexual exploitation, slavery, domestic labor, exploitation in begging (6%); multiple intended or non-determined forms of exploitation (7%).

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A GENDERED PHENOMENON

Data shows that the individual forms of trafficking were also gendered, with a disproportionate impact on women and girls yet also with very specific gendered differences in the experience of human trafficking for men and women.

The victims of most pervasive forms of exploitation, i.e., sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, and intended sexual exploitation, were 99,9% women and girls.

Exploitation for domestic labor and intended domestic labor also predominantly targeted women and girls (77%). Labor exploitation, forced labor, and intended labor exploitation, on the other hand, target more men and boys (58%) - although the gap is not wide.

Exploitation for begging is both gendered and age bound, with most victims assisted being boys (62%), and all recorded victims being minor as young as 4 months old.

Cases of slavery and forced labor in combination with slavery also included mostly men and boys (71%), although the sample analyzed was limited and does not necessarily confirm a gendered pattern. In Niger, slavery is still a prominent cultural practice that concerns men and women, but the assisted cases reported here are victims of slavery linked with mobility and trafficking.

Besides the use of children in exploitation for begging, the exploitation of children was also predominant in cases showing mixed exploitation for begging and domestic labor. All other forms of exploitation were either solely or mostly linked to adults.

This confirms and expands on a previous analysis conducted by IOM and the ANLTP-TIM in 2017<sup>36</sup>. Already then, a closer look at trafficking trends found different types of exploitation targeting victims differently on a gender and age basis.

Interviews also uncovered different degrees of vulnerability to trafficking for women and men, as well as different ways in which female and male victims fall into the trafficking trap.

Women and girls usually fall victims to trafficking right at the beginning of their migratory journey, betrayed by traffickers who disguise themselves as persons trying to help them. This is due to the main method of recruitment employed, namely contacting the family or most often contacting the victims directly. This can happen in places that are targeted by the traffickers such as the market or workplaces of the victims – e.g., beauty or hair salons. The victims are approached and told that they can earn more and can be transported without having to pay anything upfront for the travel; all they need to do is leave.



Art therapy activity at IOM's transit centre for vulnerable migrants in Agadez. IOM 2020/Monica Chiriac

36 IOM-ANLTP. *Enquête sur la Situation des Femmes Migrantes dans la Région d'Agadez* (2017)

## FEMALE MIGRANTS IN AGADEZ

In 2018, IOM and the ANLTP-TIM conducted a research in the Agadez region to better understand dynamics of female migration, culminating in the report “Enquête sur la situation des femmes migrantes dans la région d’Agadez”.

Agadez is historically at the core of migration routes and various types of flows, including trafficking movements, leading to Libya and Algeria. In 2017, 56% of women and girls VoT assisted by IOM had been registered in the transit centers of Agadez, Arlit, and Dirkou – the main towns in the region.

Analyses of information from these transit centers revealed already then that women and children are most vulnerable to human trafficking. Children would be targeted for exploitation in begging; half of trafficked women and girls were destined to sexual exploitation in Algeria and Libya, yet also within Niger.

IOM held interviews with migrant women living in maisons closes – i.e. brothels - and ghettos. Mostly coming from Nigeria, trafficked women are forced into prostitution to repay the expenses of their travel to those who transported them to Agadez, and must do the same to continue their journey as Agadez and Dirkou are usually just transit sites along the journey.

Through interviews with women in maisons closes, IOM witnessed how the trafficked women and girls lived under the strict control and influence of the trafficker in these establishment, stripped of their privacy and their freedom, unable to complete their interviews with IOM without being interrupted. Migrant women living in ghettos in the outskirts of the city had no access to water or electricity.

During interviews, trafficked women declared that their journey to Algeria or Libya had failed because of the new policies towards irregular migration as well as due to the intervention of their passeurs. Stuck in town, staying in Agadez would turn out to be very difficult for the arrests and interventions conducted by the police to check on their medical records. The records are granted by the hospital upon police signature, and are always asked to sex workers by the police. However, many VoT had been targeted of racketeering by the police.

*“Every time the police officers need some petty cash, they come to the ghettos and the maisons closes to bring women to the police station, even if their medical records are in order. They take 10,000 or 20,000 CFA and then release them.”*

Through interviews, it emerged that most often women and girls lack the resources to continue their study. Most have interrupted their academic or professional studies; more rarely, they never attended school. There are also victims who received their high school diploma and are usually targeted by traffickers with promises of support for studies in European universities.

The recruitment can also happen at the family level, through neighbors informing about outstanding work opportunities in wealthier countries and connecting them to the trafficking networks.

In these situations, poverty is often the decisive factor pushing women and girls to leave their household. The girls and women assisted were mostly unmarried or without a partner, but often they have children whom they are forced to leave behind with their families to look for better earning opportunities.

Most often, the families of victims live in very difficult situations, where feeding one more person in the household can really burden the family financially. Therefore, many girls and women leave to earn money that they can send back home to provide for their siblings and their own children.

There is a certain level of implication of families in their trafficking journey, mostly unconscious – families are the first vulnerable entry point targeted by traffickers, most often mistaken for benefactors with great opportunities, and they in turn can convince their daughters to travel with them without realizing that they are, in fact, handing them out to their abusers.

This is especially difficult to detect in the case where it is a trusted relative, neighbor, or community member connecting them to the criminal networks. One case worker highlighted that most Nigerian women and girls come from Christian backgrounds which can also play a role: reportedly, many girls are connected to networks even through the Church, where the priest helps the parents to send off their daughter so that she can earn money to send back to the family.

Lack of education at the family level also plays into these dynamics, making the concoction of poverty and ignorance a thriving ground for deception and manipulation by traffickers.

Upon return, stigmatization for being VoTs (for instance, for having been exploited sexually) can happen at the community and at the family level according to stories from caseworkers. After the return to their country of origin, there are cases of female victims who come back to transit centers as their parents refuse to welcome them back into the house because they will once again increase the burden on the household, while they should have been procuring money instead. This can happen particularly in the case of pregnancy following rape and/or sexual exploitation. This type of pressure weighs very heavily on the victims, who are most often deeply traumatized by what they endured.

*“ In those cases, the family can be reticent. Some girls arrive at the centers in denial of their pregnancies and worry about what the community or the family will say: she did not bring anything back but another mouth to feed.”*

*Interview with an IOM Case Worker*

The dynamics are often different when it comes to male victims. Interviewees underlined that in the case of men and boys, trafficking is often closely intertwined with migration and even migrant smuggling. Often, male victims were, at the beginning, migrants who left to look for better job opportunities and not recruited directly by traffickers. It is only once they arrive to their country of transit or destination that they fall victims to human trafficking. Their migration journey might entail being smuggled, and this is often how they find themselves in trafficking networks after being sold by their smugglers to other exploiters after the crossing. They are often married, and they receive some kind of support from their family for travelling. They usually have a higher education level, attend or have completed university, and leave their country to look for remunerative jobs.

A caseworker working with men highlighted that older victims were most often exploited through blackmail to the family, asking for money and keeping the victim in captivity for work when the family could not manage to pay the ransom.

Children are even more vulnerable to exploitation and deception. According to a caseworker, children who are trafficked usually come from poor backgrounds, have to abandon their studies for lack of resources to continue, or never attended school in the first place.

There are two main ways in which children, particularly boys, end up in trafficking scenarios: some of them are supported by their families, who agree to the venture and even pay the travel fees for their children; while others steal their parents' money and flee, their parents unaware. Reportedly, migrant boys mostly leave with the hope of becoming football players, especially in Europe.

Children exploited for work or prostitution are usually teenagers, on average 13-17 years old.

Children can be recruited in their country of origin or can fall victims to trafficking networks in the course of migration, while they seek to reach their final destination – usually not northern Africa, but Europe: Italy, Spain, France, the United Kingdom. The way children are recruited is most often through friends and acquaintances contacting them with opportunities or sharing posts or pictures found on the internet through social medias, unaware of these being traps for trafficking. For those supported or pushed by their families, it is the traffickers approaching the family and making fake promises.

Human trafficking appears therefore strongly age and gender-bound. However, across the board, most victims share a common background element: economic hardship or, at best, the need to look for better earning opportunities to provide for themselves and/or their households. This finds confirmation when compared to broader analyses of vulnerabilities and challenges reported by migrants in general – i.e., not only VoT - travelling along the Western, Central, and Northern African routes or the Central Mediterranean Routes.<sup>37</sup>

## THE TRAFFICKING NETWORKS: MAIN TRENDS

### ACTS AND MEANS OF TRAFFICKING

The most used act of trafficking is usually fully or partially deceptive recruitment<sup>38</sup> by an acquaintance of a member of the family or a ‘agency of recruitment for employment’, or an unknown person who come and recruit in the neighborhood or at their workplace.

Victims are also transported and either transferred to other traffickers or exploiters (and most often are not asked to pay for the transport, which is a first indicator of potential trafficking) or harbored, usually in a maison close or locked house with armed guards keeping them de facto imprisoned.

The most common mean of trafficking used to attract, coerce, and maintain a victim in a trafficking scenario, is deception: the victims are either lured by promises of opportunities that actually do not exist (such as the case of women and girls hoping to have access to work or study and ending up in prostitution instead) or they may be aware of the nature of the opportunity (as it might be the case of men accepting certain work opportunities) but are deceived about the inhumane conditions - e.g. work without rest, no pay, harsh conditions, physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse, and the confinement in the exploitation sites or trafficking houses with no freedom to move. The abuse of the position of vulnerability of the victim or use of power by the part of the trafficker and the exploiter is highly common. Victims are also maintained in the trafficking situation through threat, blackmailing, physical force, surveillance, confinement, deprivation of all liberties, sexual abuse, and withholding any salary paid to the victim for their work.

Interviews unveiled that witchcraft and other beliefs are used to exert and maintain control over victims, including through tissue harvesting. For example, case workers listened to the testimonies of women whose hair and blood had been procured without their consent to serve as material for sorceries on them and their families in case they tried to escape.

Men are reportedly brought to informal prisons or guarded houses in Libya where armed guards prevent them from leaving. Some men also report sexual violence, albeit not frequent, as a means of constraint and control.

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37 IOM. *Migration in West and North Central Africa and across the Mediterranean (2020)*. Chapter 11: Challenges on migration routes within West and Central Africa. Verena Sattler, Harry Cook

38 Fully deceptive recruitment: victims are lured by promises of opportunities that do not exist and upon arrival at the destination instead they are exploited by the traffickers against their will.

Partially deceptive recruitment: victims may be aware of the nature of the opportunity but are deceived about the terrible conditions of the promised opportunity. See IOM. *Trafficking in Persons: Victim Identification and Assistance Training Guide*, p. 3-4.



### JOHN, 27 YEARS OLD, SIERRA LEONE

*"I left Sierra Leone in 2016. I have two children, a wife, and our situation had become too difficult when I lost my job. I was a plumber. So when I found out that the job I was doing paid so well in Italy, I borrowed \$500 to pay for my travel. I said goodbye to my family and crossed Guinea Conakry, Senegal, Mali, Benin and Niger. From the town of Tahoua in Niger, a smuggler handed me over to someone. When I arrived in Tamanrasset in southern Algeria, my smuggler sold me for 30,000 Dinars. As soon as I arrived, I was locked up and raped by 5 people. The nightmare lasted two months. Then to pay back the 30,000 Dinars, I was subjected to hard labour. This lasted one year. One day a fire broke out in one of the neighboring houses. My guards opened the doors. That's how I was able to escape. A compatriot gave me 5000 Dinars to leave Algeria."*

It should be noted that victims of trafficking are very unlikely to be aware that their particular experience falls under the human trafficking offence, punishable by law. For some of them, this is just an unfortunate turn of events, where someone tried to help them and it did not work out in their favor. There are victims who indeed realize the betrayal and manipulation at the very origin of their experience, yet they are not necessarily able to ascribe this to human trafficking. Consequently, victims are not aware of the specific pathways of assistance and legal justice that they might be entitled to, and do not know enough about their rights – which is what led IOM to establish a partnership with ANAJJ to address these information gaps.

## ROUTES AND TRAFFICKERS

The data analysis sought to identify links between points of entry into IOM assistance and destinations or sites of exploitation. The availability of details on exploitation destination or site was limited, hence the number of cases analyzed constituted a marginal portion of total VoT received in each point of entry into assistance. However, some potential correlations could be identified, and they were confirmed by qualitative interviews.<sup>39</sup>

- 1 among the cases analyzed, for those assisted in Agadez, Libya is the main destination or site of exploitation. To a lesser extent, VoT assisted in Agadez were also trafficked in or destined to Algeria, Nigeria, Mauritania, and Niger.
- 2 all cases analyzed which were assisted in Arlit were trafficked in or destined to trafficking in Algeria.
- 3 almost all cases analyzed which were assisted in Dirkou were trafficked in or destined to trafficking in Libya. One case had been exploited in Dirkou.
- 4 all cases analyzed which were assisted in Niamey were trafficked in or destined mostly to Algeria, as well as Libya, Niamey, other places in Niger, and Benin.

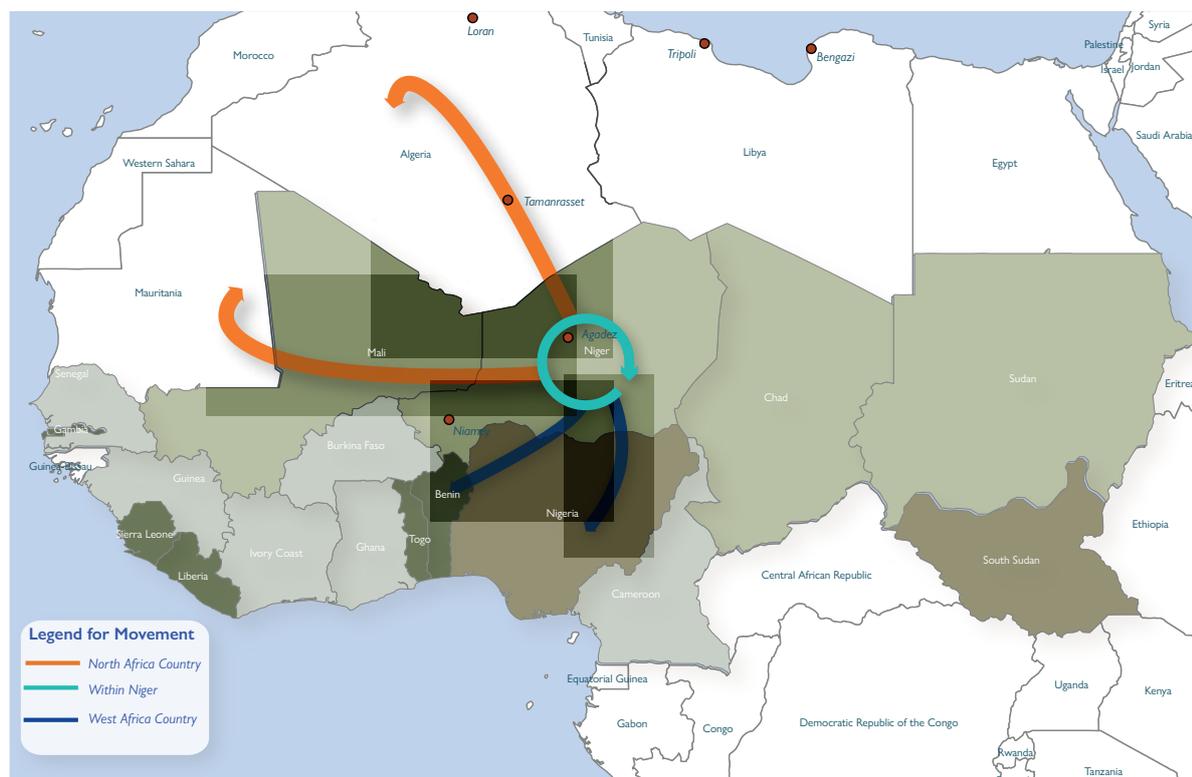


Figure 5: Frequent Destination Sites for Exploitation

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>39</sup> Prevalence refers exclusively to the cases with details on destination or site of exploitation

Furthermore, as already mentioned, routes have fragmented with the increase of controls and policies to regulate the smuggling of migrants. However, it is well known that for trafficking coming from Nigeria, the route usually taken is passing through Sokoto (Nigeria), then in Niger through Dosso, Zinder, Tahoua, and Agadez.

A caseworker assisting unaccompanied migrant children (UAMC) reported that:

- 1 Children from Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia usually pass through Tombouctou, Mali, and are directed to Algeria. These routes do not cross Niger, but these children end up in Niger on their way back to the country of origin, often following a forced return from Algeria.
- 2 Children from Benin and Burkina Faso tend to pass through Niger on the Agadez route, going through Tibiri towards Dirkou or the route Agadez/Niamey to Arlit, then on to Algeria or Libya.
- 3 Children from Niger are often trafficked from Zinder through Agadez and to Algeria.

As per the destination sites, it is hard to determine which areas of Algeria or Libya are the most hit by trafficking. The victims have often no way of knowing and reporting where they have been exploited, as they are confined in their site of exploitation or have little to no way to communicate with the outside world. However, as for labor exploitation targeting men, it was reported that all main cities including Tripoli and Benghazi as well as more rural areas are often hosting exploitation sites, particularly private gardens, fields and construction sites. In Algeria, victims of trafficking are often exploited in construction sites in areas such as Loran and Tamanrasset.

It should be noted that often double exploitation happens, both in Niger and in the destination country. Women and girls may be kept in Niamey or Agadez, in well-known prostitution neighborhoods, for a certain amount of time before being trafficked yet to another destination.

Often victims end up at the centers because they have been repatriated and referred by the police. Some never reach their intended final destination or are pushed back at the border. There are also isolated cases who manage to escape and arrive on their own to the centers.

Traffickers are both men and women, but mostly women according to one interviewee working directly with victims – albeit they are usually part of larger networks where men are widely operational. Usually in maisons closes there is a woman, the so-called madame, who manages the exploitative business and is the main exploiter to whom the traffickers/recruiters, both men and women, hand over the girls and women.

A Report on Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants produced by the ANLTP-TIM and the Ministry of Justice confirms the trend of women being often the traffickers. According to the document, 134 traffickers were brought to justice for human trafficking and related crimes in 2017. Among them, 34% were men, 63% were women, and 2% were boys. Although age information is not available for almost half of recorded traffickers, 49% of those recorded were over 35 years old, while 2.5% were young adults between 18 and 35, and 1.5% were children between 13 and 17. On the other hand, for 2018 the same report highlighted a predominance of men referred to justice for trafficking in persons and related crimes, with 70% of 117 individuals being men, the remaining 19% women, and 11% boys. Most recorded traffickers (47%) were between 18 and 35 years old.

The report also looked at their education profile. 32% of them never attended school; 9% had received a Quranic education, less than 1% completed primary education, 2.5% received secondary education, and none of them had received university education. It should be noted that for over 50% of recorded traffickers there were no available education levels.

According to the report, most traffickers and smugglers were Nigerien nationals (84%), followed by Nigerian (2.6%) and Senegalese (2.3%) as well as nationals from Libya, Guinea, Ghana (1.8%), Chad, Mali (1.3%), Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, and others (<1%).

The report shows that 48% of traffickers and smugglers had Niger as their destination; significant numbers also move towards Algeria (21%) and Libya (7%). Nigeria (3%), Saudi Arabia and Côte d'Ivoire (<1%) are also destinations. Almost 20% of traffickers and smugglers are directed towards other countries that are not specified by the data available.

The qualitative interviews then sought to explore the nexus between being a victim of trafficking and becoming a trafficker. It is difficult to determine a connection between being exploited and becoming an exploiter. However, it was noted that several men are connected to the trafficking or smuggling networks through acquaintances or co-nationals who were once migrants themselves and are either complicit with the trafficking networks or are coerced by the traffickers or smugglers to convince other migrants to join them. In these cases, men are convinced by other men in the country of destination to send them some money for the travel, to be then betrayed by these fellow nationals or migrants and handed over to trafficking networks.

## PURPOSES OF EXPLOITATION

### SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, FORCED PROSTITUTION, INTENDED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

38% of cases analyzed in the framework of this research had become victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (27%), forced prostitution (1%) and intended sexual exploitation (10%). Victims were overwhelmingly women (99%) over 18 years old (92%).

Victims are predominantly nationals of Nigeria (87%) as well as Liberia (2%), Niger (2%), Sierra Leone (2%), and Cameroon (2%) with a few from Burkina Faso (<1%), Chad (<1%), The Gambia (<1%), and Guinea Conakry (<1%).

A number of them had been exploited in or were on their way to Libya and Algeria, while some had been held and exploited in Niger, mostly in Agadez and Niamey.

Traffickers and exploiters usually hold them at the beginning of the migration process, with the excuse of needing a refund for the costs that they incurred for the transportation of the victim. Through interviews, it emerged that in the case of women and girls exploited for prostitution, their documents and or their phones are often taken away to prevent their flight.

Among the abuses endured by victims of sexual exploitation, one case reported being forced by the trafficker to use clarifying products to lighten her skin to appease clients.

Prostitution in ghettos or maisons closes is the most common purpose of trafficking through sexual exploitation. There are isolated cases of individuals taking a woman or girl, promising them help, and then enslaving them for personal sexual purposes or buying them as a spouse or a slave - yet this is a rarer form of sexual exploitation.

Usually, girls and women exploited in prostitution end up in the transit centers thank to the referral of police and gendarmerie who raid maisons closes and arrest the traffickers. Some reported being sent away from the establishments because the exploiters did not need them anymore or because they had earned enough, thus finding themselves free but also vulnerable to further unsafe or exploitative situations. There are some cases of women who found themselves in this situation, without any money and any place to go, accepting the help of others who in turn exploited them. A staff member reported the testimony of a victim who had been offered shelter by other women who ended up sexually abusing her.

Another practice associated with sexual exploitation and slavery, but not per se a widespread trafficking purpose, is the practice of wahaya. The wayaha is a fifth wife, usually a young girl, who is taken as a slave in addition to the four wives allowed by Islam. She does not hold the same rights as all the other wives and is treated de facto as a slave or property. This practice is more common in the Tahoua region.

### DOMESTIC LABOR AND INTENDED DOMESTIC LABOR

4% of victims had been trafficked for exploitation in domestic labor and intended exploitation, although this percentage is likely to be significantly higher and include many women and girls exploited but identified as victims of forced labor in general and not specifically exploited for domestic work. Victims assisted were mostly women and girls (77%), both under and above 18 years old in similar proportions.

Most victims come from Benin (32%), Nigeria (32%), and Niger (18%) as well as Sierra Leone (4.5%), Mali (4.5%), Guinea Conakry (4.5%), and Côte d'Ivoire (4.5%). Several victims had been exploited in or were supposed to be trafficked to Libya, Benin, and Algeria.

Women and girls are brought to private houses where they work without resting and without getting a salary. A caseworker mentioned that many of them return with impairments due to the physical and sexual abuse that they have endured in these situations, including rape as a form of punishment for reclaiming payment for their work. Across the board, victims in these exploitation settings were treated inhumanly. For instance, one victim reported to the caseworker that she was woken up every morning and called up for work with cold water being thrown on her face.



#### HARMONY, 24 YEARS OLD, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

*"I was working in a hair salon owned by a lady with four other girls. My father lives in River State, my mother lives in Abia State with another man. One day, a lady who comes to do hair in the salon told us that we could go abroad to a place where I could get a lot of money by working. At first I refused. The lady often called me to have my news; she was nice. I accepted her proposal: her brother had a big hair salon in Morocco and he needed a good braider. I left Nigeria with 15 other girls in December 2020. We went through Kano, then Zinder in Niger. This is how we arrived in Libya, all in the same house. When I asked what we were going to do I was told "the work here is prostitution." When I refused, the people in charge of the house ordered the girls to beat me up. I didn't know where to go, I had no money. I had to accept to save my skin. I stayed in that house for 7 months. One morning the police came to take us all to prison, beating us and taking what little we had. After a week we were sent back to Madama and from Madama we were taken to the IOM transit center in Dirkou. The IOM team has said they will help me to go home."*

## EXPLOITATION IN BEGGING

23% of cases had been exploited for begging. All recorded cases were children, with the youngest victim being only 4 months old. 62% of victims were boys. The overwhelming majority of victims came from Niger (64%) and Nigeria (36%).

A large chunk of cases had been assisted by IOM outside of formal centers: the boys assisted outside the centers were all talibés from Quranic schools in Nigeria.

According to a study conducted by the Nigerien Association for the Treatment of Delinquency and Crime Prevention (ANTD) this is not an isolated phenomenon.<sup>40</sup>

Forced begging is a region-wide issue, which extends beyond Niger in multiple countries of the Sahel and West Africa including Mauritania, The Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, Chad, and Burkina Faso.<sup>41</sup> In Niger, the exploitation of talibés for begging developed mainly since the 1980s after an economic crisis hit the country and Koranic schools moved to urban centers from the rural areas to escape poverty. Mostly an urban phenomenon, forced begging has been historically used by marabouts to raise money and gather resources for their subsistence and for the subsistence of their Koranic schools.<sup>42</sup> Begging is traditionally and socially associated with learning how to be humble. Some marabouts are entrusted with over a hundred children and no support from their parents. A lot of marabouts do not have the means to respond to basic needs of all the children in their schools and that is how they justify sending children begging for food and water in order to survive. In some cases, marabouts force children to beg the whole day, do not host or educate them and beat them if they do not bring back a certain amount of money at the end of the day. This method of exploitation is employed by an increasing number of Quranic masters who exploit their pupils, often at the complete detriment of the religious education that they expect to receive in Quranic schools.<sup>43</sup>

Exploitation in begging became preponderant in Niger, leading the recent ordonnance on trafficking to encompass this phenomenon into the national counter-trafficking framework. This type of exploitation usually occurs either through the marabout, as explained above, or also a third person to whom parents have entrusted the child. This phenomenon was particularly widespread in the department of Kantché.

## THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF KANTCHÉ

In 2013, 92 migrants were found dead in the Nigerien desert, a few kilometers from the Algerian border. They were part of a convoy of 112 people, mostly women and children coming from the department of Kantché, in the Zinder region. Following this incident, the Algerian and Nigerien authorities reinforced their efforts on the control of migratory flows and the protection of migrants on the axis Kantché - Arlit – Algeria. During the operation, a large number of women and children were identified and apprehended in irregular convoys on the road towards Algeria, and/or in forced begging networks in border Algerian towns.

In light of this phenomenon, IOM conducted a study, “Des femmes et des enfants de Kantché sur la route de l’Algérie. Analyse socio-anthropologique d’un phénomène mal connu” (2016) to understand further the migratory flows from and towards this region of Niger. Research showed the prevalence of human trafficking targeting in particular women and children in this department, apparently characterized by what has become known as the Kantché phenomenon.

In the department of Kantché, migration is a socio-cultural phenomenon rooted in the identity of the community, historically directed towards Nigeria. According to interviews conducted for the present research, people from Kantché also migrated heavily for work towards Arlit, as there were a thriving community from

40 ANTD. *Souffrances Sous Silence: Enquête sur la Mendicité Forcée des Enfants Talibé au Niger* (2020), p.5,8

41 *Ibid*, p.9

42 *Ibid*, p.8

43 *Ibid*,p.8

Zinder there. Those continuing to Assamaka and Algeria from there found it very remunerative and since the beginning of the 2000s, movements rerouted towards northern Africa, also due to the rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Routes leading to Libya, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia offer multiple options for the people migrating from Kantché, nowadays mostly women and children. According to the local community, migration towards Algeria has brought about important financial contributions. At the same time, the perception around migration is markedly gendered. For men and boys, leaving Kantché is the brave thing to do, while women migrating to northern Africa are suspected to get into prostitution once at destination. That is only one side of the story: female migration can indeed result in sexual exploitation, yet it most often overlaps with the trafficking of children, ill-concealed under the pretext of *confiage* or *location d'enfant*, the practice of entrusting a child to a third person for their care.

Trafficking in this context greatly benefits from the complicity of parents and is regulated by social norms which encourage the recruitment of children in the migratory endeavors of women, either their own mothers or other women to which other families entrusted their children. Parents agree to hand their children over to women so that they can be exploited in begging in Algeria. At the end of the day spent begging, the sum collected by a child is taken by the woman who brought him and a portion is sent to the parents. The selection and recruitment of children happens at the extended family level, which makes it almost impossible to denounce the exploitation as everyone benefits from the sums earned by the child. Both girls and boys from vulnerable or less vulnerable households are trafficked to Algeria through these channels. Smaller kids are usually chosen for their potential to attract greater compassion when begging; teenagers are not prioritized by the migrant women. The latter leave with as many children as they can and the parents are well aware of what awaits the child once in Algeria; on the other hand, children themselves usually do not expect ending up begging and living on the streets or next to the mosque.

The level of complicity families show in this particular context should be observed in light of the perception that this phenomenon has at the community level. As highlighted by the IOM study and confirmed by interviews conducted in the framework of the present research, children who accept departure to Algeria to help provide for their families are making parents proud, elevated as examples to encourage other children to do the same – even at the expenses of their education.

This markedly female-driven migration and trafficking led to changes in gender dynamics at the household level, as explained by the MPFPE representatives interviewed for this research:

*“Men have almost abdicated their role as providers in the family,  
waiting for women to send back money.  
This is reshaping the customs of the community.”*

The exploitation for begging at the hands of other people is most frequent in the month of Ramadan, according to a case worker, as in this month believers practice generosity as per one of the pillars of Islam.

4% of victims had been trafficked for a combination of exploitation for domestic labor and begging. They were mostly women and girls (77%), all under 18 years old. They were all from Niger.

## LABOR EXPLOITATION, INTENDED LABOR EXPLOITATION, AND FORCED LABOR

20% of victims had been trafficked for labor exploitation, intended exploitation, and forced labor. They were predominantly males (58%) and adults (85%). The remaining percentage of women mostly refers to domestic labor which was categorized as forced labor.

Victims came mostly from Nigeria (31%), Benin (14%), Sudan (9%), and Niger (8%) as well as Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sud Sudan, and Togo. Most of them are young adults, between 18 and 35 years on average, exploited for work without pay and kept in confinement.

Amid sites of labor exploitation and forced labor, victims reported being trafficked to Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, and Libya.

Usually, men are exploited for work in fields or gardens in Libya, while exploitation in construction works is most common in Algeria. Victims are usually harbored in locked or guarded houses where security prevents them from leaving. In Libya, they are usually detained in houses that are de facto prisons, and the exploiters find them jobs but keep the salary for themselves. According to one caseworker, exploitation sites in Libya are multiple, including Tripoli, Benghazi, and all main urban centers as well as the countryside. In Algeria, well-known sites of exploitation include Oran and Tamanrasset. A few victims reported having been exploited in Malian gold mines. Exploitation in mining sites also happens within Niger, particularly in the North, targeting adults as well as children. Victims are mostly Nigerien, Sudanese, and Chadian.

A study<sup>44</sup> conducted in 2021 by IOM focusing on the intersection of internal migration and small-scale gold mining in the northern region of Agadez - in the areas of Tchibarakaten, Tabelot, Timia, and Iférouane, where small-scale gold mining sites are numerous - highlighted the correlation between this activity and the risks of child exploitation and trafficking. The research found that the weak implementation of regulatory frameworks on artisanal gold mining results, inter alia, in the presence of children in the sites. Besides being environments where child labor can occur, the sites are particularly unsafe for children due to explosive and chemical substances which are employed for mining activities.

IOM Niger is currently conducting broader research on mining sites, which will be published next year, to elaborate on these findings.

A caseworker reported a significant number of victims of trafficking welcomed in the transit center in Agadez who preferred requesting asylum instead of benefitting from AVR through IOM. For them, the feeling of shame for having been victimized and abused was too strong to allow their return to the family or the community. Indeed, most reported incidents of physical violence and sexual abuse, especially on minors, to exert control. In line with the IOM-UNHCR Framework document on developing standard operating procedures to facilitate the identification and protection of victims of trafficking, such cases are referred to the UNHCR for their consideration under international protection pathways.

For minors, also the confiage of children to a marabout can lead to forced labor and labor exploitation for children, especially in the Tillabéri region. In these cases, marabouts use their connections to place children to work in fields and collect their salary.

Other minors trafficked for labor exploitation end up working in private gardens in Libya or Algeria, without pay.

## SLAVERY

A small number of cases were reportedly victims of slavery (1%), predominantly males and all adults. This percentage is not representative, as slavery is still well established in some regions of Niger; but victims are either not identified, referred or assisted; or they do not seek to come out of their situation as they fear the uncertainty or safety risks occurring from looking for alternatives; or such occurrences are not denounced enough by communities, protection actors or law enforcement.

One male adult victim had also been trafficked for both forced labor and slavery. Victims of slavery from outside Niger almost all came from Liberia and The Gambia, with one case from Côte d'Ivoire.

Interviews with IOM staff highlighted that slavery in its most traditional form happens mostly in the Tahoua region. There are still people who hold slaves in their houses; and if their slave has children, these children can even be given away to the daughters or sons of the masters as a wedding present when they get married and leave the house.

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44 IOM. *Etude sur la Problematique de l'Orpaillage dans la Region d'Agadez. Rapport Provisoire. October 2021.*

## OTHER FORMS OF EXPLOITATION AND ABUSES

Several victims had experienced multiple forms of exploitation or intended exploitation, or cases were reported with undetermined forms of exploitation including forced labor and labor exploitation alongside sexual exploitation or intended exploitation. Generally, in these cases exploitation targeted mostly women and girls, confirming the gendered pattern disproportionately affecting females which was seen across almost all forms of exploitation analyzed in this report.

Albeit child recruitment by armed groups is indeed a substantial risk in Niger, as recently confirmed by a recent study by Amnesty International,<sup>45</sup> none of the victims assisted in IOM transit centers or the government run shelter reported being trafficked for recruitment by armed groups.



### MOHAMED, 10 YEARS OLD, MATAMEY, KANTCHÉ REGION

*“My parents could no longer feed me, we are a large family. A lady from the village said she would take care of me and we left for Agadez. When we arrived, I had to beg. My “godmother” set an amount of money that I had to give her every day. If I didn’t find the money, she would beat me and deprive me of food. I was not allowed to wash, and I left in the morning dressed in ragged clothes. I had no days off. I begged from morning until nightfall. At night I slept on the floor without a blanket, I got sick. My godmother refused to treat me, I had to go begging with a fever. One day people from the Regional Direction of Child Protection in Agadez found me. I went to Zinder, to the ANLTP/TIM reception and protection centre for victims of trafficking. There I was housed, fed, clothed and cared for. I wanted to return to be with my parents so the staff working at the shelter traced my family and after a risk and needs assessment mission, I was able to reunite with my family.”*

45 Amnesty International. “I Have Nothing Left Except Myself”: The Worsening Impact on Children in Conflict in the Tillabéri Region of Niger

## REFERRALS

The main channel of referral for victims towards IOM and Government-run centers for assistance to victims of trafficking was through law enforcement actors and state services.

47% of all cases were referred by law enforcement actors including the Gendarmerie (Assamaka, Tahoua); the Police (Agadez, Arlit, Assamaka, Dirkou, and Zinder); the Directorate for Territorial Surveillance (DST); and other Defense and Security Forces (FDS), which suggests that human trafficking awareness and capacity building efforts are fruitful.

6% of victims had been referred from state services: mostly the MPFPE (4%) through its regional or departmental institutions such as the Regional Directorate for Child Protection (DRPE) of Zinder and the Departmental Directorate for Child Protection (DDPE) of Arlit; the ANLTP-TIM (1%); the Juvenile Courts of Ouallam and Agadez (1%); and the Public Prosecutor in Niamey (<1%).

23% of victims were identified in the centers themselves by protection assistants. Some cases had been repatriated or pushed back from Algeria and as part of the official convoys from Algeria.

5% of them had been referred by a third person, while one case had been referred from a church.

1% of victims had been referred by the Nigerian authorities.

Humanitarian organizations also referred victims to the centers. 5% of victims had been referred by IOM Mali or in the context of activities conducted by IOM Niger (rescue operations and community mobilizers). One case had been referred by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and one case had been referred by the UNHCR. Other partners referring cases in Niamey include COOPI, especially for VoT in need of psychological assistance or AVR.



Painting activity at IOM's transit centre for men in Niamey, IOM 2020/Monica Chiriac



New migrants arriving and being registered at the Agadez transit centre. IOM 2020/Monica Chiriac

# 5 LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

## PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

### AWARENESS

An essential challenge for IOM and its partners remains sensitization work on trafficking, on multiple levels.

It was highlighted through interviews that awareness work should be strengthened not only in transit and destination countries, but also in countries of origin, where vulnerable populations should be informed of what trafficking is, what leads to these scenarios, and which consequences one can incur. At the Niger national level, trafficking remains in focus, but it is not well-known by a large portion of the population.

IOM conducts extensive trainings on trafficking and supports ANLTP-TIM for sensitization activities but according to Protection staff and different partners, there is still a certain level of disinformation or confusion - for instance about how migration and trafficking relate to each other and differ from each other, even within actors involved in counter-trafficking work - also due to the frequent turnover of frontline actors. This remains a challenge at the national level.

At the local level, when it comes to populations, more accessible awareness and information were also highlighted as a gap. IOM staff working closely with victims and partners joining IOM in its countertrafficking efforts voiced a few recommendations, some of which recurring.

For instance, it was highlighted that further work is needed on the dissemination of texts and contents on trafficking, so that they become accessible to everyone. To warn people about the risks of certain situations and opportunities, one interviewee suggested: *“at the local level we could work more with community radios for awareness-raising in the local languages that everyone can understand. Capacity-building in French works, but local languages could reach potentially everyone”*. Cross media campaign would be more effective (including local radios, tv, social medias, etc.). Also the engagement of traditional leaders, including religious leaders, is important as they have a recognized authority in Nigerien communities and are listened. A partnership with the National Association of Traditional Chiefs (ACTN – association des chefs traditionnels du Niger) would be an option. Regarding religious leaders, there is no one single representative association for all Islamic movements in Niger, but working with the most representative and also with koranic teachers and schools, called “makarantas”, could have an impact on the reduction of trafficking of children.

On this note, it was also suggested that victims of trafficking could one day become, if interested and willing to share their stories, witnesses and key actors in awareness activities, to make an impact in their country of origin and help to discourage girls and boys from embarking on unsafe journeys. Indeed, interviews with case workers highlighted that some victims are committed to raise awareness back in their country of origin to prevent other girls and women from falling into the same networks.

It should be acknowledged that sensibilization can only go as far; concrete alternatives to irregular migration would mitigate the risks of ending up in the hands of traffickers more effectively. However, that requires broader and costly efforts which are not always sustainable without steady funding and a coordinated strategy.

### SUSTAINABLE ASSISTANCE

Assistance also presents its challenges. The six transit centers of IOM in Niger are part of the MRRM program, which main objective is to ensure that the human rights of migrants are respected and that migrants in need of specialized services are effectively assisted. This includes offering a voluntary return for stranded migrants who wish to go back to their country of origin, as well as reintegration support is given once the AVR beneficiary is back in their community. However, it is not always in the best interest of the victim to go back to their country of origin,

nor is it always their intention. In this case, IOM refers the victim to a partner, usually an NGO able to provide the necessary assistance in Niger or UNHCR if the victim is seeking international protection. But the main challenge is to find sustainable solutions in Niger, as the economic and educational opportunities are scarce. There are very few institutions hosting VoT and there is no formal network of host families.

Most often, victims do not want to stay in Niger, also due to linguistic, cultural, and religious differences and barriers. In most cases, they would prefer transferring to another region in their own country of origin rather than seeking to rebuild and reconstruct their life in Niger.

A reintegration project is crucial for VoTs, also as it prevents them from falling in an exploitation situation again. IOM has a comprehensive understanding of reintegration, which cannot be limited to an individual income-generating project, and it leads efforts to propose and sustain psychosocial activities in the village of origin, assist with civil documentation, and support other members of the community and community structures inter alia.

However, there are not sufficient resources to propose holistic solutions; this requires partners with expertise in socio-economic development (e.g., food safety, education, health) to invest in the regions of origin of migrants or VoT to ensure that these victims do not fall back in trafficking situations, as poverty and scarce opportunities are major push factors for irregular migration and common conditions among VoT. In the department of Kantché, for instance, during the monitoring of the support that IOM provided to victims and the community at large, local authorities noticed that some reintegration beneficiaries would sell the kits that they had received in order to gather money for a new departure. While this trend was observed more often among stranded migrants than VoTs, it shows the need to expand to holistic strategies to disincentivize unsafe migration potentially ending in a THB situation.

## CASE MANAGEMENT

Another difficulty encountered by IOM case workers and front-line actors (ANLTP, police, state social workers), which is also a general challenge in Niger and globally related to TiP, is to identify male victims of trafficking. The caseload of adult male victims of trafficking might be, in reality, significantly higher. There is a strong resistance of men to open up about their experience, especially if it entailed abuse and exploitation. This closeness - markedly different from a reportedly more resilient approach of women, who manage most often to seek assistance and open up to the case workers and the psychologists in the centers - represents an obstacle for adequate assistance, as it is estimated that many male victims of trafficking pass unidentified and potentially not assisted in the most appropriate way.

The psychological impact linked to being a victim of trafficking also manifests in the extent and quality of assistance that can be granted to children. While speaking of children assisted at the CEPPP, the representative of the MPFPE interviewed explained how the trauma endured by children makes it very hard to communicate with them in case management. On children trafficked for forced begging: *“The marabouts terrorize them to the point that when they are rescued from these situations, it is really difficult to extract information and hear their stories.”*

This is compounded with scarce availability of psychologists in more rural areas, calling for training of social workers on how to offer at least essential mental health support.

## INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

### LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Counter-trafficking in Niger relies first and foremost on the Ordonnance 2010-86 as its main legislation and tool in the fight against trafficking in persons, yet this tool has not yet been evaluated and evolved into law.

The implementation of juridical texts after their adoption remains a challenge in Niger. The national legislative and institutional framework does not yet comply fully with international norms and a number of international conventions that were ratified have yet to be translated into internal legislation, also due to the challenging nature of ensuring coherence of text and interpretation among different legal instruments. It should also be noted that penalties for the crime of trafficking in persons are not commensurate with those for crimes such as rape.<sup>46</sup>

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46 US Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Niger

## INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Niger is one of the few countries in the region with two dedicated institutions for the fight against human trafficking, the CNLTP-TIM and the ANLTP-TIM. The CNLTP-TIM is a multi-disciplinary commission and brings together representatives of multiple ministries in the definition and planning of the country's counter-trafficking response. The enactment of the counter-trafficking agenda is subsequently entrusted to the ANLTP-TIM, an independent agency under the Ministry of Justice. Despite the existence of this anti-trafficking architecture, both institutions enjoy very limited financial autonomy which remains a challenge for the planning and follow up on policy commitments. In addition, their institutional anchor within the Ministry of Justice – while ensuring strong leverage and connection to the prosecution chain – commends high levels of coordination with other ministries in order to reach the multi-disciplinarity cooperation required for TiP prevention and protection responses. To mitigate these challenges, key institutional actors have shown interest in the possible adaptation to Niger of an integrated multidisciplinary TiP agency based on the Nigerian NAPTIP model, which would bring together under one institution elements from the police, prosecution, immigration, social welfare and protection authorities.

## RECEPTION CAPACITY

Regarding the protection of VoT, Niger made significant progress since the adoption of the latest National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, particularly in the context of direct assistance. With a view to ensure adequate assistance and protection to victims, Niger also adopted decree N° 2018-429/PRN/MJ of 22 June 2018 to determine the modalities for the creation, functioning, funding, and evaluation of shelters for VoTs. On 18 July 2019, the first shelter was officially inaugurated by the ANLTP/TIM in Zinder. From its establishment until August 2021, the shelter welcomed over 180 victims. In case of urgent necessity, the center also regularly supports migrants from Zinder in collaboration with the DRPE of Zinder.

However, despite the human resources provided by the state, the provision of direct assistance remains resource-intensive. In addition, the Special Fund for Victim Compensation has not been operationalized yet.

Niger being a vast country, accessibility to services is proportionately limited, as there is only one government run center servicing the entire country. Several social workers reported that the lack of further facilities where victims can be transferred and supported once they have been identified is a challenge. Availability of emergency basic assistance and reception capacity in key border posts and police stations is also consistently raised as an important investment to be made in order to ensure that law enforcement officials can receive victims in a protection-sensitive manner. The sustainability of services within the shelter remains a priority for the CNLTP-TIM and the ANLTP-TIM.

## IDENTIFICATION

Turnover and rotations are an important element of public authorities and law enforcement staffing practices in Niger, also to mitigate the unequal quality of life across the territory and offer career mobility incentives. Consequently, many social workers, border officials, law enforcement officers and court appointees may lack the opportunity to develop the necessary competencies and knowledge to identify victims over time and apply it to provide adequate assistance. For this reason, frontline actors in the fight against trafficking tend to underreport cases of trafficking (both due to lack of adequate knowledge of the phenomenon and of skills required to identify victims).

The National Referral Mechanism validated in June 2020 features strong provisions in order to support access to care and rights for victims; however, its rollout and application will require further investment from the authorities. Periodic, multi-disciplinary training initiatives so far have supported the growth of identification capacity among frontline actors, with promising results that can be built upon. Working on the initial training curricula of these front-line actors (e.g., social workers, police, judges) to ensure TiP and protection of VoTs are well integrated is an action to be considered in the future.

### TIP DATA AND EVIDENCE-BASED RESPONSE

The limited availability of quality data regarding human trafficking in Niger also affects the response. There is little comprehensive national qualitative or quantitative evidence on trafficking across the country which can provide an overview of general trends (e.g., on forms of trafficking; geographical specificities; profiles of victims or traffickers; acts, means, and purposes of exploitation; the level of understanding of populations) which would be essential to inform the design of better prevention and response actions. While the ANLTP-TIM has been working on developing a centralized data management system, data inputs to this system rely strongly on other ministries and CSOs to compile data on trafficking and smuggling of migrants. Effective specific and harmonized tools for this exercise remain necessary, ensuring adequate disaggregation by sex, age, nationality, type of exploitation, acts and means. Moreover, a systematic evaluation of TiP interventions based on a standardized framework would be essential in order to capitalize on actions undertaken, including identifying lessons learnt and good practices.

### COORDINATION AMONG PARTNERS

Human trafficking in Niger concerns a number of institutions from the Interior, Defense, Justice, and Protection sectors, respectively supported by several technical and financial partners in their response to TiP. It is essential that efforts are coordinated consistently in order to leverage each partner's strength and expertise, maximize the impact of resources, and ensure a comprehensive response covering the entire territory.

### INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Human trafficking is largely a cross-border phenomenon, particularly in a crossroad country such as Niger. The government has placed itself at the forefront of the human trafficking international response by hosting the international meeting resulting in the Niamey Declaration ; however, international cooperation on TiP remains at this stage largely focused on prosecution and law enforcement collaboration to prevent the crime and pursue its perpetrators. More is needed to ensure that cross-border standard operating procedures and mechanisms facilitate safe and confidential referrals to specialized assistance, including safe, sustainable and dignified return and reintegration options.



Awareness-raising session on the risks of irregular migration in Agadez. Photo: IOM/Monica Chiriac



# 6 CONCLUSIONS

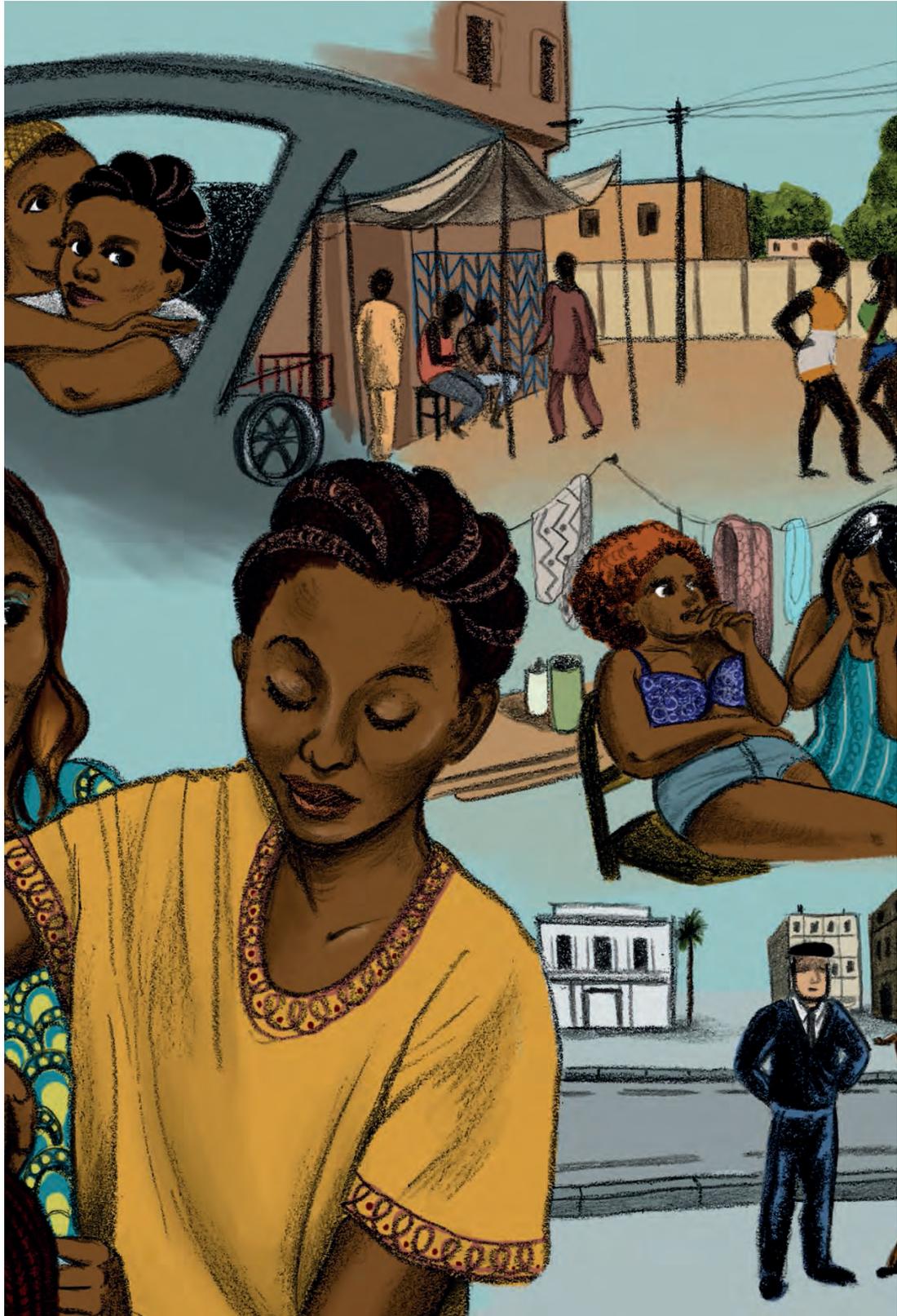
Human trafficking remains a complex issue to tackle in Niger, on one side enabled by lack of socio-economic opportunities that pushes people to migrate through channels that might become unsafe and on the other hand, facilitated by social and cultural practices which continue to play into the prevalence of human trafficking. The pressure on youth to provide for their families, the perception of certain practices as the norm and not as a crime, and the pervasive lack of education and/or opportunities in certain areas seem to neutralize part of the sensitization and prevention efforts conducted by national authorities and their partners.

Women and girls appear to be most at risk, predominantly becoming the target of specific forms of exploitation (e.g., domestic labor, sexual exploitation), in which traffickers seek to involve them through networks that can penetrate communities and households to deceive young women with promises of safe and dignified work abroad. Men and boys, on the other hand, face greater risks of becoming victims to other kinds of labor exploitation, to which they are often led by the smugglers who facilitate their border crossing – confirming how interwoven the phenomena of smuggling and trafficking. Across the board, children are trafficked for begging, a practice as common as harmful for their health, safety, dignity, and access to basic needs. Among men, women, and children, victims come in high numbers from Niger as well as from other countries in the region, making Niger a country of human trafficking departure, transit, and destination.

In these circumstances, the task of effectively reducing human trafficking is a gigantic one for the Government of Niger alone; coordination and cooperation at local, national and regional levels are essential to tackle this crime through joint protection, border management, and justice efforts. At the same time, the complexity of security and socio-economic conditions within the region will continue to encourage irregular migration for those who cannot afford or access safe channels for mobility, which have a higher risk to fall in trafficking. Partners should invest their joint efforts, each within its own expertise in protection, health, education, and economic development, in localities where the complexity of security and socio-economic conditions continues to encourage irregular migration and expose individuals to trafficking networks.

While the commitment of the Government of Niger to the fight against human trafficking led to significant progress in the last few years through the development of dedicated frameworks, tools, and protection services, challenges remain and further resources, structures, and capacities are needed to advance sustainably in the protection of victims and the prevention of TiP.

IOM remains steadily engaged in the fight against trafficking in persons, standing beside the Government of Niger and all national institutions dedicated to protecting migrant and preventing human trafficking.



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