

HUMAN SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING ECOSYSTEMS
– NORTH AFRICA AND THE SAHEL

2022 SERIES



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

CHAD

POLITICAL CRISIS
SIGNIFICANTLY DISRUPTS
HUMAN SMUGGLING

Alice Fereday

JUNE 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief is part of a series published by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC's) North Africa and Sahel Observatory. This brief would not have been possible without the continuous support and advice of Mark Micallef, Matt Herbert, Alexandre Bish, Jessica Gerken, Younes Nanis, Raouf Farrah, Emadeddin Badi, and Jalel Harchaoui. The GI-TOC Publications and Communications teams have been key collaborators, ensuring that the exacting standards of delivery are met.

We would also like to acknowledge the dedicated efforts of a large number of local researchers engaged by the GI-TOC across the region. While we will not name them for their safety, they have our profound gratitude and respect for the excellent work they do under difficult circumstances.

The research for this report was supported by funding under the North Africa and the Sahel and Lake Chad windows of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the GI-TOC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Fereday is a senior analyst at the GI-TOC. She researches trafficking and smuggling dynamics in Niger, Chad and Libya. She is also specialized in armed conflict mediation in the region, with a focus on southern Libya.

© 2022 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Global Initiative.

Cover: Chadian military inspect vehicles at a checkpoint at Djermaya, on N'Djamena's northern boundary, during the lockdown in January 2021.

Photo: GI-TOC

Please direct inquiries to:

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

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Methodology.....	4
Political and security crisis follows rebel incursion and Déby’s death.....	6
Military crackdown on human-smuggling routes from Kanem region	10
Movement from Chad to Niger grows in popularity.....	11
New routes from southern Chad facilitate human trafficking	16
Crossings resume at N’Guéli bridge and human-smuggling activity declines.....	18
Koutéré remains major transit point from Cameroon to Chad.....	21
Conclusion and outlook	22
Notes.....	24



INTRODUCTION

In 2021, human-smuggling activity in Chad was heavily affected by political and security developments, following a period of relative stability for smuggling dynamics. Since 2016, human smuggling through Chad has grown, though migrant numbers remain low in comparison to routes via Sudan and Niger.

In part, rising numbers of migrants in transit through Chad are due to the displacement of smuggling routes from Niger and Sudan in 2016, which drove foreign migrants and asylum seekers to use Chad as a transit hub on their way north to Libya.¹ Furthermore, a substantial portion of irregular migration through the country is linked to the gold mining economy in northern Chad and along the Libyan border. Since discovery in 2012, these goldfields have contributed to the country's appeal for poor migrants aiming to make money on their journey north.²

In 2020, COVID-19-related restrictions on movement had little impact on human smuggling, which was already illegal and had led networks to develop operations to bypass a government ban on travel to northern areas of the country.³ Rather, the arrival of mercenary groups coming from Libya to the goldfield, which fuelled demand for workers, caused an uptick in the movement of Chadian and Sudanese migrants.⁴

However, in 2021, human smuggling and trafficking in Chad was disrupted by an incursion by the Front pour l'Alternance et la Concorde au Tchad (Front for Change and Concord in Chad – FACT) in April and the subsequent death of President Idriss Déby. These events triggered an increase in military surveillance and pressure on routes to northern Chad, as well as a military crackdown on the Kanem region, through which key smuggling routes pass. Military operations targeting FACT sympathizers and those suspected of joining its ranks brought departures to northern Chad to a halt. These operations also affected movement through N'Djamena, and via intermediary hubs such as Mao, Moussoro and Abeche, and severely curtailed the number of migrants arriving in the north of the country. Beyond the initial disruption in April, persisting fear of incursions prompted the Chadian government to continue to target the Kanem region, from where most FACT fighters originate. This resulted in continued disruption of human-smuggling activities between April and December 2021 and is likely to continue to affect movements in 2022.



General Mahamat Déby (second left), son of the former Chadian president, attends a military parade.

Photo: Djimet Wiche/AFP via Getty Images

The heightened securitization also led to the development of new routes from eastern and southern Chad to the northern goldfields. These new routes allowed for human-trafficking networks to continue their recruitment of young migrants in southern Chad who were to be sold as workers to entrepreneurs in the goldfields. One such route emerged from Roro, a small town located 500 kilometres south-east of N'Djamena, which has become an important departure point for Abeche.

The reopening of the border between Cameroon and Chad after a 16-month COVID-19-related closure also contributed to renewed arrivals of migrants to Chad. However, the border with the Central African Republic (CAR) has remained closed, and rising tensions and insecurity in the cross-border area have continued to discourage travel in the region.

This brief is part of the latest round of publications emerging from GI-TOC research on human smuggling and trafficking in Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Niger, Chad and Mali.

Since 2018, the GI-TOC has undertaken monthly monitoring of human smuggling and trafficking in North Africa and the Sahel. The first report of the project, 'The human conveyor belt broken', published in early 2019, described the fall of the protection racket controlled by Libyan militias that underpinned the surge in irregular migration between 2014 and 2017. The second report of the project, 'Conflict, Coping and COVID', published in early 2021, detailed the evolution of human smuggling and trafficking in the face of Libyan conflict and the regionwide COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring both the disruption of the system and its broader continuity.

Rather than a single report covering trends and dynamics in 2021, the GI-TOC is publishing a series of briefs, each covering a single country as well as a regional overview brief. These build on the previous reports mapping regional smuggling and trafficking, as well as the political and security dynamics that impacted and influenced the irregular transport of migrants in 2021. The series of briefs underscores the rebounding importance of smuggling from and through Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Niger, Chad and Mali, and the ways in which dynamics are intensifying as the COVID-19 pandemic ebbs and a rough peace is maintained in Libya.

Methodology

This brief is based on the GI-TOC's field monitoring system. During 2021 – the reporting period for this study – local field researchers in Libya, Niger, Chad and Mali collected data through semi-structured interviews with smugglers, migrants, community members, security-force officials, politicians, NGO personnel, international observers and others.

Activity by field monitors was supplemented with fieldwork by GI-TOC analysts in the territories covered, though these visits were curtailed in 2020 due to COVID-related travel restrictions.

Finally, open-source data relevant to human smuggling and trafficking was systematically collected and analyzed on a weekly basis. This data was used to formulate questions and inquiry areas for field research and validate field interviews collected by researchers.

Care has been taken to triangulate the information detailed. However, the issues detailed in this brief are inherently opaque and the geographic areas covered often remote, volatile or difficult to access. Because of this, the brief should be viewed as a snapshot, which will feed into future reporting and analysis from the GI-TOC that is planned to capture the rapidly evolving dynamics in Chad and across the broader region.



Photo: GI-TOC



POLITICAL AND SECURITY CRISIS FOLLOWS REBEL INCURSION AND DÉBY'S DEATH

On 11 April 2021, rebels belonging to FACT, which had been based in southern Libya, launched an offensive in Chadian territory via the Kourzo Pass, located close to the Chad–Niger border, 65 kilometres south of Libya.⁵ This was the most serious attack faced by the Chadian government since 2008, when a rebel coalition stormed the capital. The FACT offensive resulted in heavy clashes with the Chadian army in the Kanem region, where the rebels were ultimately defeated, with surviving members of the group ultimately retreating to Libya.⁶ In the midst of the battles in Kanem, President Idriss Déby, Chad's leader for 30 years, went to the front line, where he was killed in unclear circumstances on 20 April.⁷ His death led a major upheaval in Chad's political and security dynamics. General Mahamat Déby, son of the deceased president, became head of Chad's transitional military council (Conseil militaire de transition, CMT), placing him in de facto control of the country.

The political and security crisis in Chad in the wake of FACT's offensive, and resulting military operations, both in northern Chad and the Kanem region, led to disruptions in human-smuggling activity. According to *passseurs* (smugglers), between 11 April and early May, human-smuggling activities across Chad declined and in some places paused altogether.

This pause was fleeting, however, with human smuggling gradually restarting in some areas after May. However, checkpoints and controls along routes to northern Chad remained elevated, severely impeding movement to northern Chad, particularly from the southern and western regions of the country. *Passseurs* explained that human-smuggling activity had been reduced in the wake of the FACT incursion, with fewer departures and fewer smugglers operating on routes to the north. One *passseur* reported that those who continued to operate took extra precautions and attempt to conceal the identities of their passengers:

It is very rare to find smugglers who organize trips to Kouri Bougoudi, as in the previous months; and currently, only the Tebu originating from the extreme north of Chad have the possibility of transporting migrants with a very limited number by justifying the trip. In case of interception, they identify the passengers as originating from Bardaï or Zouar [northern Chad].



Captured rebels from FACT at the headquarters of the Chadian military, May 2021. Photo: Djimet Wiche/AFP via Getty Images

While the impact was most pronounced in the north, and in areas such as Kanem associated with the FACT (see below), the crisis also affected smuggling activities through major urban areas. In the capital, N'Djamena, smuggling declined sharply in late spring. According to a local business owner in the city, departures were affected by the deployment of security forces in the city and surrounding areas following the offensive and the establishment of checkpoints along main roads leaving the city. By the end of April, some departures had reportedly resumed, but at lower levels than those seen prior to the April events. *Passeurs* operating on routes linking N'Djamena to northern Chad reported that between May and December 2021, very few departures took place, and migrants aiming to use these routes were having to wait several days – sometimes weeks – to find transport.

Typically, N'Djamena functions as a major node for transport, with migrants passing through the city to reach key departure points such as Abeche (650 kilometres east), Faya (775 kilometres north-east), Moussoro (235 kilometres north-east) and Mao (230 kilometres north).⁸ From there, they find *passeurs* to transport them to the goldfields or Libya. Until April, movement from the capital to these intermediary hubs had allowed migrants and smugglers to avoid suspicion by concealing their true destination. This changed after the FACT incursion, with all departures from N'Djamena closely monitored by authorities.

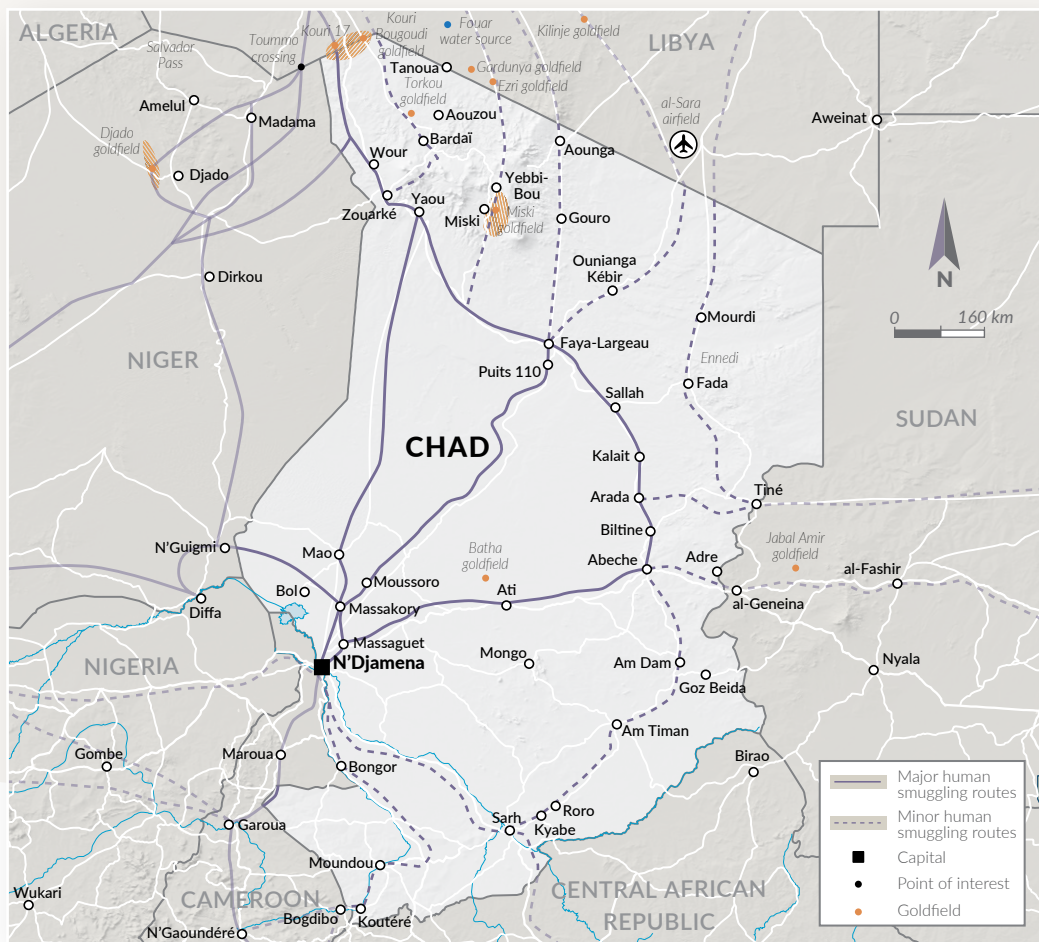


FIGURE 1 Human smuggling routes through Chad, December 2021.

Among intermediary transit hubs, Abeche in eastern Chad has historically been one of the most prominent. It is used not only by migrants arriving from southern Chad and N'Djamena, but also by those arriving from Sudan, due to its proximity to the Chad-Sudan border. The town acts as a major logistical hub for those travelling to northern goldfields and to Libya.⁹ According to local *passseurs* in Abeche, after April 2021, the number of migrants travelling per week stood between 100 and 300, a sharp drop compared to January, when between 500 and 900 migrants travelled in an average week. These estimates include both Chadians and non-Chadians. Owing to the reduction in departures, the price for the journey from Abeche to Libya or Kouri Bougoudi increased from between FCFA75 000 and FCFA100 000 (€114–€152) in early 2021 to FCFA150 000 (€229) in April and May.

In other intermediary hubs, such as Mao and Moussoro, departures were completely suspended in the wake of the FACT incursion. This is due in large part to their being centrally located in regions that saw an increase in security presence following the offensive. Mao is the capital of the Kanem region, where many of FACT's members originate from, and an area that saw heavy fighting at the end of April.¹⁰ On 3 May, checkpoints were set up at every entry point to the city, impeding *passseur* movement in the area.¹¹ Here, too, the contraction of smuggling activities resulted in an increase of prices, with transport from Mao to the north rising from between FCFA75 000 and FCFA100 000 (€114–€152) prior to the incursion to FCFA150 000 (€229) after it.

A similar ramp-up of security affected departures from Moussoro. Although no military operations took place near Moussoro, it is located less than 140 kilometres from the Kanem region, and its position as capital of the Bahr El Gazel region – also home to the Gouran community associated with FACT – made it the focus of security forces since the offensive. Departures from Mao and Moussoro had not resumed as of December 2021.



A group of migrant workers suspected of travelling to northern Chad arrested in the Kanem region, November 2021. Photo: Alwihda Info Facebook page



MILITARY CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN-SMUGGLING ROUTES FROM KANEM REGION

Despite the withdrawal of the remaining FACT forces to Libya, the persisting fear of incursions prompted the Chadian government to continue to target the Kanem region throughout 2021 in a bid to prevent Chadians from travelling to northern Chad or Libya and joining the ranks of FACT. Furthermore, *passeurs* interviewed by the GI-TOC believed that the Chadian military pursuing the targeting of specific ethnic groups, such as the Gouran, with an uptick in military presence and security checks recorded in the Kanem region, where many Gouran originate from.

The crackdown targeted local military personnel suspected of complicity with FACT, as well as dozens of civilians from the Gouran community. A list of 27 people arbitrarily arrested by the Chadian military in the Kanem region was authenticated in October by the Chadian Convention for the Defence of Human Rights (Convention tchadienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme, CTDDH).¹² The situation reportedly remains tense across the region, with heightened hostilities between local communities and the military. This situation is likely to persist in 2022, with continued arrests and anti-smuggling operations impeding departures.

Heightened military and security presence in Kanem also resulted in greater numbers of anti-smuggling arrests. In August, for example, the Kanem gendarmerie indicated they had apprehended 118 people, accused of travelling to Libya via northern Chad, including suspected gold miners, in an operation that included the seizure of nine vehicles.¹³ On 14 November, military forces in Mao intercepted a group of 41 people (including 18 minors and one Libyan) who were reportedly travelling to northern Chad.¹⁴ On 13 December, they arrested a further 10 individuals, including a number of passengers whom authorities claimed were gold miners, as well as smugglers who were transporting them.¹⁵



MOVEMENT FROM CHAD TO NIGER GROWS IN POPULARITY

Facing challenges in northbound movement in mid- to late-2021, some Chadians reportedly turned to travelling west to Niger, in order to access to southern Libya and northern Chad. These routes were not new – having been used for several years by Chadians to bypass the government ban on travel to northern goldfields; however, their use reportedly increased in the wake of the FACT incursion. The routes were also disrupted – albeit temporarily – beginning in October, as the military set up checkpoints to stop Chadians entering Niger by road.

One of the bypass routes goes northwards from N'Guigmi to Dirkou, while the other proceeds via a more circuitous route via Diffa, Agadez and Dirkou. The latter route, although longer, is usually cheaper (due to the availability of public transportation) and relatively fast. Travelling along the route from N'Djamena to N'Guigmi, Diffa, Agadez and then Qatron takes approximately 10 days, whereas travel from N'Djamena to Kouri Bougoudi or Qatron using routes through Chad can take two to three weeks because of the time involved in finding *passeurs*.

The routes to and through Niger are usually far less risky, and this was particularly the case in the wake of heightened Chadian anti-smuggling efforts after April 2021. If caught in Niger, migrants found to be travelling illegally are usually transferred to the IOM or released after the payment of bribes. In contrast, in Chad, both smugglers and passengers face arrest and imprisonment. The transport of Chadians between Niger and Libya is reportedly tolerated by Nigerien authorities in the same way as the transport of Nigerien nationals is (neither falls under the 2015 anti-smuggling law).

From Chad, reaching Niger (via N'Djamena, Bol and finally N'Guigmi) is relatively easy and safe, as informal transport companies (known as *tacha* in Chad) operate regular departures from N'Djamena to N'Guigmi (a small Nigerien town located 40 kilometres from the Chadian border and 120 kilometres north-east of Diffa) with a fleet of Toyota Hilux vehicles. Passengers therefore avoid having to pay *passeurs* or *coxeurs* (middlemen who organize journeys for irregular migrants) for this leg.

Drivers operating on this route claimed in mid-2021 that the majority of passengers were Chadian gold miners. However, the route is also known to be popular among Chadian and Sudanese migrants seeking economic opportunities in Niger's goldfields, some of whom intend to travel onwards to Libya or Algeria, and eventually Europe. Other profiles travelling between N'Djamena and N'Guigmi are

Chadian students enrolled in universities in Niger, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali or Burkina Faso, and vehicle salesmen travelling to Cotonou in Benin. Small numbers of migrants from other nationalities also use this route, including economic migrants from Cameroon and asylum seekers from the CAR.

The route's growing use was noticed by Chadian authorities, triggering a limited crackdown. On 3 October 2021, the Chadian military began patrols on the route between N'Djamena and N'Guigmi, as well as carrying out strict security checks on vehicles transporting passengers. According to passeurs interviewed in October, the checks, which took place for two weeks, targeted any Chadian

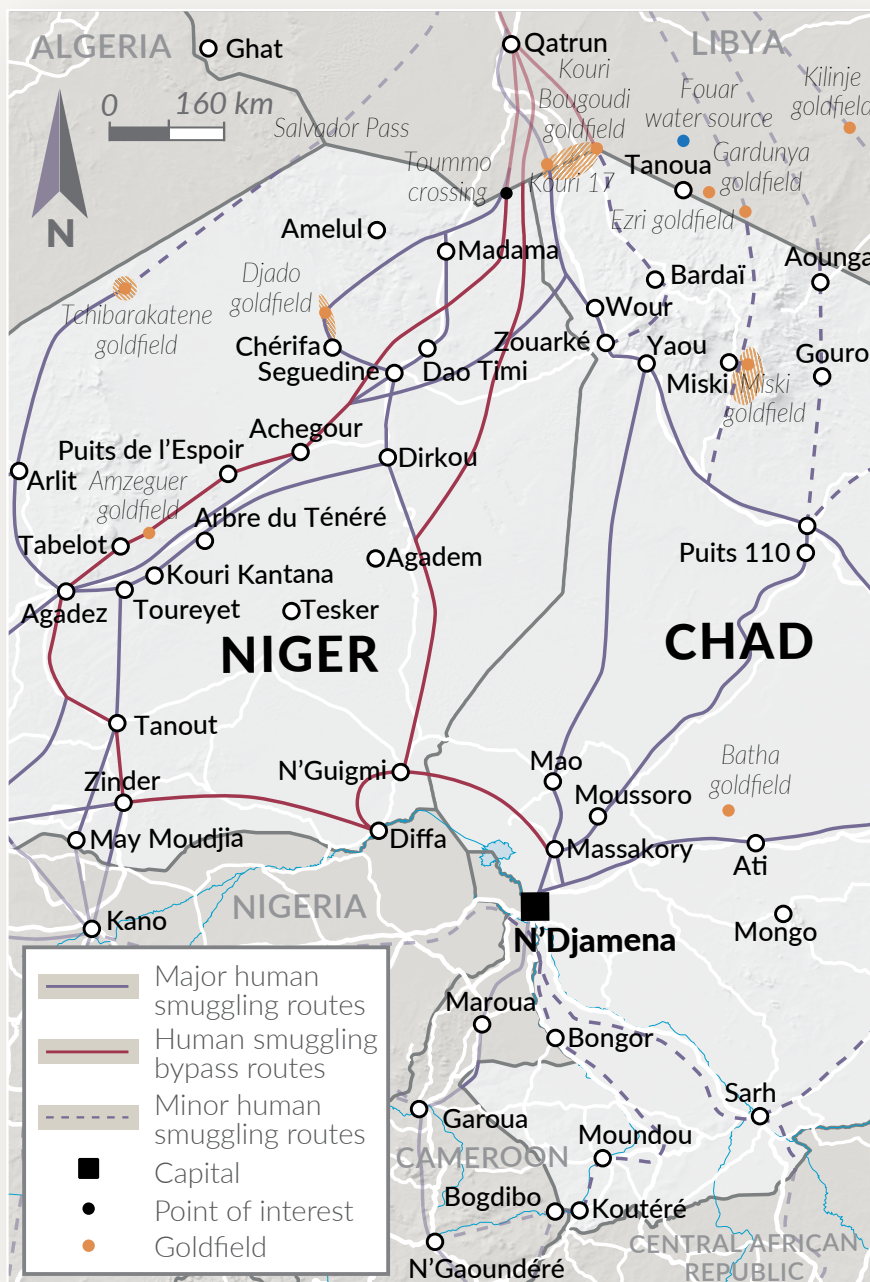


FIGURE 2 Routes through Niger used by Chadians to bypass restrictions.

nationals who could not justify their travel to Niger. These passengers were taken to nearby Mao, 200 kilometres east of the Nigerien border, for further verifications. All other passengers, including Chadian students and foreign migrants, were allowed to continue after presenting identity papers and supporting documents. A Chadian student travelling from N'Djamena to N'Guigmi on 5 October described his journey:

A few dozen kilometres west of Liwa, the Chadian army stopped us to check identity papers [...]. Already it was dark, and they asked us to sleep like that on the ground until the early hours of the morning so that they can do a good check [...].

In the morning, they called us one by one to verify our identities, then they separated us into groups of Chadian students, foreigners, and other Chadians with or without papers. After three hours of control and investigation, they separated us with our driver and the other Chadian passengers with or without papers and decided that only Chadian students and foreign nationals (mainly Beninese and Nigerians) can continue. So, they put a large truck at our disposal to [travel to] a village 45 kilometres from where we had stopped. The Chadian army turned back all other passengers to Mao to review their cases.



Vehicles transporting passengers between N'Djamena and N'Guigmi parked at Daboua, Chad, on the way to N'Guigmi in Niger, November 2021. *Photo: GI-TOC*

These restrictions resulted in a decrease in the number of departures from N'Djamena to N'Guigmi. According to drivers operating on this route, fewer than three vehicles departed N'Djamena for N'Guigmi per day during the restrictions, compared to between six and ten vehicles (transporting a total of 90–150 passengers) prior to the restrictions.

By 20 October, patrols had reportedly ceased, leading departures from N'Djamena to rebound back to normal levels. Activities have reportedly continued to evolve favourably for *passeurs*, with around 20 vehicles arriving in N'Guigmi per day. It is likely that the temporary nature of the operation is a result of the military's strained resources, which were affected by the large number of deployments it faced, including in the north and in the Lake Chad area, where the fight against Boko Haram continues a top priority.

However, the deployment of the military along the route to Niger demonstrates knowledge by the Chadian authorities of the alternative itineraries used by Chadians travelling north, and a willingness to curb any attempts to bypass restrictions in Chad. This could presage further travel restrictions in Chad and the continuation of a strict crackdown on human smuggling, which could also affect foreign migrants transiting Chad. Currently, the N'Djamena–N'Guigmi route is one of the only itineraries available to foreign migrants and Chadians travelling to northern Chad and Libya.



Photo: Getty Images



NEW ROUTES FROM SOUTHERN CHAD FACILITATE HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In 2020 and 2021, routes linking southern Chad to northern Chad via Abeche underwent an evolution, expanding first due to COVID-19 restrictions in N'Djamena in late 2020 and early 2021, and, after the FACT incursion, as a result of the security crackdown on northbound movement.

Historically, most migrants from southern Chad or neighbouring Cameroon and CAR travelling to the goldfields or Libya typically transited N'Djamena, travelling via Moundou and Bongor, before reaching other hubs further north, such as Abeche and Faya. In contrast, routes linking Chad's southern regions directly to Abeche saw very little activity.

However, this changed during the N'Djamena lockdown, which lasted from 31 December 2020 to 22 January 2021. At that point, *passeurs* began operating between Roro, a small town located 500 kilometres southeast of N'Djamena in the Moyen-Chari region, and Abeche, via Am Timan and Am Dam. The use of this route continued even after N'Djamena's lockdown was lifted, becoming particularly important in the wake of the FACT incursion as it allowed *passeurs* to avoid routes in western Chad which were heavily targeted by the military. Interviewed in February 2021, the former sub-prefect of Roro described how departures of migrants there had soared: 'People travel via N'Djamena, but with the COVID measures, smuggling intensified on the Roro route because it is the only passage towards the north.'

In part, the increased movement along the route reflects the continued growth in jobs and economic opportunity in northern Chad linked to the gold-mining sector. Since the end of 2020 this has led to a growing demand for labour at the gold sites, and a linked rise in the pool of migrants in Roro seeking smuggling services to travel north. Migrants have been mostly Chadians from Roro and from the Moyen-Chari region, but also small numbers of Sudanese and Central and East African migrants.

However, the existence of the route has also led to an increase in human trafficking from southern Chad to the north of the country. This too is linked to growth in the gold-mining sector in northern Chad. In recent years, many *passeurs* have taken on the role of recruiters, offering prospective miners the option to travel on credit. The smugglers are then paid by the gold-site owner who employs the miners through indentured-labour arrangements, under which the miners must first repay their debt

before they can start earning a wage. These agreements often slide into exploitation, with workers often changing hands between different gold-site owners.

Since early 2021, recruiters have increasingly targeted Roro. A local fisherman who sells produce at the market reported that it has become a recruitment hub for smugglers:

They come to Roro on a Saturday, for the market, and they gather migrants for departure. Roro is now a hub for gathering and selling migrants. It's a well-organized chain all the way to the Libyan border. The Roro–Am Timan–Abeche route is the most used and emerged when they confined N'Djamena.

A 19-year-old student from Sarh (100 kilometres south of Roro), interviewed in February 2021, reported that smugglers parked at the Roro market were offering what they claimed was 'free' travel to the goldfields, targeting young – and poor – Chadians with little alternative economic prospects. Another returnee explained how youth were also being lured by young men claiming to have made a fortune in gold mining: 'The gold miners [who returned] show what they have bought with the money – new motorcycles, building houses – so it's really an enticement for others to leave.'

Some of those who choose to take their chances do not make it to the goldfields. Three migrants interviewed, all men aged between 20 and 27, explained how they managed to turn back when they reached Abeche on the route to the Kilinje goldfield in Libya, in order to escape what they feared was a trafficking operation.

These testimonies provide insight into the ways in which smugglers exploit the vulnerabilities of young Chadians from the southern regions to recruit them for gold mining. By portraying gold mining as a unique opportunity to earn money easily and deceiving young men into thinking the travel is free, smugglers are able to lure Chadians into indentured-labour agreements. These practices also illustrate the blurred lines between legitimate internal movement within Chad, human smuggling and trafficking. Although migrants make the journey willingly, they often do not do so from a position of knowledge about the working conditions at the goldfields.

Sources confirmed that the upward trend in departures from Roro has continued in recent months, suggesting a more durable shift in smuggling dynamics in the region. The use of routes that avoid N'Djamena and traverse eastern Chad directly are also increasingly attractive, as they are relatively less likely to be targeted by anti-smuggling operations instituted by Chadian authorities since April. The emergence of Roro as a departure hub could represent a worrying development, as smugglers step up their recruitment operations in more remote localities of southern Chad.



CROSSINGS RESUME AT N'GUÉLI BRIDGE AND HUMAN-SMUGGLING ACTIVITY DECLINES

On 17 June 2021, Chadian authorities announced the reopening of the country's border with Cameroon.¹⁶ Chad's land borders had been officially closed since March 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions, but air travel had resumed in August 2020.¹⁷ After a 16-month closure, the move was welcomed by locals, traders, and migrants either side of the border and reduced the demand for clandestine crossings offered by *passeurs*.

Although Chad and Cameroon share a 1 116-kilometre border, travel between the two countries primarily takes place at two border crossings: the N'Guéli bridge, which links the Cameroonian town of Kousséri to Digangali (located just south of the Chadian capital N'Djamena), and the Bogdibo–Koutéré crossing, which links Touboro in Cameroon to Moundou (Chad's second-largest city).

The Koutéré crossing remains the most popular for both legal and clandestine flows between Cameroon and Chad due to mounting insecurity in northern Cameroon. However, the N'Guéli bridge between Kousséri and N'Djamena is also of strategic importance for local dynamics, given its proximity to the capital.

In N'Guéli, the lifting of restrictions reduced the need for *passeurs*, who had been catering to an increased demand for migrant-smuggling services since March 2020. Although clandestine crossings continue for those travelling without valid documentation or transporting illicit goods, migrants with valid documentation can now cross the border legally, and their numbers saw a significant increase after the border reopening. According to a local contact in N'Guéli, around 300 migrants cross the border each week, compared to between 50 and 70 during the closure. This is in large part due to the price of clandestine crossings, which can cost up to FCFA35 000 (€53).



FIGURE 3 Human-smuggling routes between Cameroon and Chad, August 2021.

However, estimates of numbers remain vague, as it is often difficult to distinguish migrants from people travelling to Chad for other reasons. Both categories of passengers may be travelling with or without valid documentation, and among those who could be identified as migrants, some may be travelling as far as southern Chad in search of economic opportunities while others aim to reach northern Chad goldfields, Libya or Europe. The number of migrants in the latter category is reportedly only around 25 to 30 per week, representing about 10 % of migrant crossings at N'Guéli bridge.

Crossings have also been affected by an uptick in violence in northern Cameroon. In addition to Boko Haram-related violence, the region is increasingly prey to intercommunal conflict. An example of this occurred on 10 August, when an outbreak of violence in Cameroon's Logone-Birni district left 32 dead and 74 injured. The clashes, which followed growing tensions over agricultural, fisheries and pastoral resources, reportedly constituted the most violent intercommunal conflict ever recorded in Cameroon. The incident also led to significant population movements, with 7 300 individuals internally displaced within Cameroon and a further 11 000 people fleeing Cameroon for Chad. The arrival of such a large group of Cameroonian refugees in Chad is unprecedented and is seen by some as a reversal of past displacement patterns.

A similar episode of violence broke out on 5 December 2021, as revenge attacks between herders and fishermen left 22 people dead and over 30 injured.¹⁸ The violence again began in Logone-Birni district, around 50 kilometres from Kousséri, but by 8 December had spilled over to the town of Kousséri, forcing hundreds of inhabitants to flee to neighbouring Chad. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that a total of about 30 000 refugees have arrived in Chad from northern Cameroon as a result of the violence.¹⁹ According to a local contact in N'Guéli, many refugees had to cross the Logone river, which separates Kousséri in Cameroon from N'Djamena in Chad, using pirogues, as traffic across the N'Guéli bridge became saturated on 8 December. By 9 December, the violence in Kousséri had reportedly ceased, but tensions remain high.²⁰ In a Twitter post on 8 December, Déby, called on the international community to support Chad in hosting refugees fleeing the violence in northern Cameroon.²¹ 2021 has been marked by an escalation of conflict and violence in northern Cameroon, resulting in repeated waves of displacement to Chad. Beyond the spillover risk, should this situation persist, these dynamics could put further strain on Chadian authorities to host refugee communities. Moreover, in the medium term, they could result in an increased demand for smuggling among Cameroonians trying to reach Libya or Algeria via Chad and Niger.



Crossings resume over the N'Guéli bridge between Cameroon and Chad, August 2021. *Photo: GI-TOC*

Koutéré remains major transit point from Cameroon to Chad

Mounting insecurity in the far north of Cameroon is likely to continue to render the route from Cameroon to Chad via Maroua and the Kousséri-N'Guéli crossing more dangerous, leading many migrants to opt for Koutéré as a crossing point into Chad. Previous reporting suggested that the favoured route for trucks transporting merchandise between the two countries, as well as migrants travelling to Chad, had shifted to the Koutéré crossing due to the threat from Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region and the Far North region of Cameroon. Multiple sources have since confirmed this shift.

The reopening of Chad's border with Cameroon could therefore see the Koutéré border crossing becoming a major transit point for north-bound migratory flows. Although many of the francophone migrants from Cameroon and CAR travelling to Europe prefer routes that transit Nigeria or other francophone countries (such as Niger, Algeria and Morocco), travel via Chad (through the Bogdibo-Koutéré crossing) may increase in the future.

Preference for Chad as a transit hub can be attributed to the relative safety of routes through the country, which avoid the most dangerous parts of the Lake Chad basin (northern Cameroon and north-western Nigeria). These routes pass through Touboro, Moundou and N'Djamena, before entering Niger through N'Guigmi and Diffa. Although migrants would usually also follow well-established smuggling routes between N'Djamena and southern Libya, the disruption of these routes due to upheaval in Chad since April 2021 is likely to discourage migrants from attempting to reach Libya via northern Chad.



Cameroonian migrants take refuge in Oundouma, near N'Djamena, August 2021. *Photo: Tchadinfos*



CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Human smuggling and trafficking in Chad saw significant shifts in 2021, as they are closely linked to political and security dynamics, especially those relating to northern Chad and rebel activity. This was particularly acute in the capital, as well as in western and northern Chad. Southern and eastern Chad were less affected by these dynamics, with movement from Roro to Abeche in fact reportedly increasing.

The use of new routes from southern Chad is likely to continue in 2022 and could further exacerbate the recruitment by human-trafficking networks targeting vulnerable populations. Refugee communities from Cameroon and CAR could also be targeted if the situation in these neighbouring countries further deteriorates and increases the cross-border displacement into southern Chad. The situation in northern Cameroon is of particular concern.

2021 also marked the beginning of a complex transition period for Chad following the death of President Déby. October and November saw significant developments in terms of the political process engaged by the transitional military council to pave the way for elections in 2022. These included preliminary talks with armed-group leaderships abroad, in preparation for the government-led 'inclusive national dialogue', which was due to take place before the end of the year.²² This process should involve discussions on the future of rebel fighters in Chad and could represent an important opportunity for stabilization at national and international levels. However, the re-integration of Chadian fighters is challenging, and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes have been ineffective in the past. Furthermore, the postponement of the 'inclusive national dialogue' has highlighted significant challenges in building a credible and inclusive dialogue with Chad's numerous political factions.

The outcome of Chad's transition will affect human-smuggling and -trafficking dynamics in 2022. If it fails to meet objectives in terms of electoral process and DDR, tensions and instability in the north will persist and could lead to further crackdowns impeding movements. In contrast, a successful transition process could also be crucial in reshaping how national authorities address illicit gold mining, which is closely linked to human-smuggling and -trafficking dynamics in Chad. Until now, the Chadian government has adopted a purely security-based approach, which has been unsuccessful and counterproductive, by feeding into local tensions and grievances.

If the political process in Chad allows for a new approach to address illicit gold mining in the north of the country through sustainable and credible regulation, this could reduce the risks of human trafficking and exploitation. More broadly, a strategy for northern Chad that is inclusive of local needs and allows buy-in from local communities would also pave the way for greater stability in the area. However, it is doubtful that human smuggling itself will decrease, as the demand for travel to the goldfields and further afield to Libya is likely to continue. Alternatively, the derailing of the transition process, or failure to reintegrate rebels, could see goldfields further develop as hubs for illicit activities, including human trafficking.



NOTES

- 1 Clotilde Warin, *Les conséquences des politiques de l'Union européenne sur les trajets migratoires au Soudan et au Tchad*, *Migrations Société*, 179 (2020/2021), pp. 91–107.
- 2 Mark Micallef, Matt Herbert, Rupert Horsley, Alexandre Bish, Alice Fereday, Peter Tinti, Conflict, coping and covid, Changing human smuggling and trafficking dynamics in North Africa and the Sahel in 2019 and 2020, GI-TOC, April 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/smuggling-trafficking-sahel-2020/>, p. 81.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 85
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Alexandre Bish, Soldiers of fortune: The future of Chadian fighters after the Libyan ceasefire, GI-TOC, December 2021; RFI, *Tchad: montée de fièvre dans le Nord à la suite d'une offensive des rebelles du Fact*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210413-tchad-mont%C3%A9e-de-fi%C3%A8vre-dans-le-nord-%C3%A0-la-suite-d-une-offensive-des-rebelles-du-fact>.
- 6 RFI, *Tchad: affrontements entre l'armée et des rebelles du Fact dans la province de Kanem*, 17 April 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/en-bref/20210417-tchad-affrontements-entre-l-arm%C3%A9e-et-la-colonne-rebelle-des-forces-arm%C3%A9es-pour-le-changement-au-tchad-dans-la-province-de-kanem>.
- 7 For further analysis on the circumstances of Deby's death, see Jalel Harchaoui and Rémi Carayol, La mort d'Idriss Déby, une affaire tchadienne, pas un complot russe, *Orient XXI*, 30 June 2021, <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/la-mort-d-idriss-deby-une-affaire-tchadienne-pas-un-complot-russe,4871>.
- 8 Mark Micallef, Matt Herbert, Rupert Horsley, Alexandre Bish, Alice Fereday, Peter Tinti, Conflict, coping and covid, Changing human smuggling and trafficking dynamics in North Africa and the Sahel in 2019 and 2020, GI-TOC, April 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/smuggling-trafficking-sahel-2020/>, p. 82.
- 9 Mark Micallef, Raouf Farrah, Alexandre Bish, Victor Tanner, After the storm: Organized crime across the Sahel-Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali, GI-TOC, November 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/after-the-storm/>, p. 73.
- 10 Alexandre Bish, Soldiers of fortune: The future of Chadian fighters after the Libyan ceasefire, GI-TOC, December 2021.
- 11 Al Wihda Info, *Tchad: des barrières instaurées aux entrées et sorties de la ville de Mao*, 3 May 2021, https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Tchad-des-barrieres-instaurees-aux-entrees-et-sorties-de-la-ville-de-Mao_a103386.html.
- 12 RFI, *Tchad: disparitions et arrestations signalées dans la communauté gorane*, 19 October 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20211019-tchad-disparitions-et-arrestations-signal%C3%A9es-dans-la-communaut%C3%A9-gorane>.
- 13 Al Wihda Info, *Tchad: 118 arrestations au Kanem pour tentative de départ clandestin en Libye*, 3 August 2021, https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Tchad-118-arrestations-au-Kanem-pour-tentative-de-depart-clandestin-en-Libye_a105861.html.
- 14 Al Wihda Info, *Tchad: 41 orpailleurs dont 18 mineurs appréhendés par l'armée au Kanem*, 13 November 2021, https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Tchad-41-orpailleurs-dont-18-mineurs-apprehendes-par-l-armee-au-Kanem_a108793.html.

- 15 Al Wihda Info, *Tchad: des orpailleurs clandestins appréhendés au Kanem*, 14 December 2021, https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Tchad-des-orpailleurs-clandestins-apprehendes-au-Kanem_a109642.html?fbclid=IwAR15Qn5ZAvBCanWoB97jBkgTRRXzqFwRRnIVZskCImMtbFJ8KtF7fKiNGFY.
- 16 Agence Ecofin, *Après plus d'un an de fermeture, le Cameroun rouvre officiellement sa frontière avec le Tchad*, 23 June 2021, <https://www.agenceecofin.com/transports/2306-89451-apres-plus-d-un-an-de-fermeture-le-cameroun-rouvre-officiellement-sa-frontiere-avec-le-tchad>.
- 17 Mark Micallef, Raouf Farrah, Alexandre Bish, Victor Tanner, *After the storm: Organized crime across the Sahel-Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali*, GI-TOC, November 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/after-the-storm/>.
- 18 Reuters, *North Cameroon violence between farmers, herders kills 22; residents flee*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/violence-between-farmers-herders-kills-least-22-northern-cameroon-2021-12-09/>.
- 19 RFI, *Tchad: après les affrontements de Kousséri, 30 000 réfugiés camerounais à N'Djaména*, 13 December 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20211213-tchad-apr%C3%A8s-les-affrontements-de-kouss%C3%A9ri-30-000-r%C3%A9fugi%C3%A9s-camerounais-%C3%A0-n-djam%C3%A9na>.
- 20 RFI, *Cameroun: le calme revient à Kousséri, mais la tension persiste*, 11 December 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20211210-cameroun-violences-intercommunautaires-meurtri%C3%A8res-dans-l-extr%C3%AEme-nord>.
- 21 Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, *'Une urgence humanitaire est provoquée au Tchad par les conflits intercommunautaires qui sévissent au Cameroun et au Soudan...'*, Twitter, 8 December 2021, <https://twitter.com/GmahamatIdi/status/1468691556681011202>.
- 22 By the end of December, the national dialogue had still not taken place. On 4 January 2022, President of the CMT, Mahamat Idriss Déby, announced the dialogue would be held on 15 February 2022. See VOA Afrique, *Le dialogue national tchadien repoussé au 15 février*, 4 January 2021, <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/le-dialogue-national-tchadien-repouss%C3%A9-au-15-f%C3%A9vrier/6381191.html>.



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 500 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net