Mobility and conflict in Liptako-Gourma

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**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past four years the triangle border region of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso – known as Liptako-Gourma – has experienced heightened intercommunity violence and attacks by violent extremist organizations (VEOs). Regions affected the most include Mopti and Gao in Mali, the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions in Niger, and the Sahel and Est regions of Burkina Faso. The escalation of armed violence has forced an unprecedented number of civilians to abandon their homes, and this trend continues as of March 2020. These developments not only have an impact on the population living in the area, but also put at risk people on the move, including refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as seasonal, short-term circular, and longer-term migrants travelling to North Africa and Europe.

This study assesses these dynamics in more detail based on a review of existing quantitative data combined with key informant interviews with migrants, transporters, influential local leaders, humanitarian actors, civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs) and international community actors present, operating and involved in conflict and/or migration related issues in Liptako-Gourma. The central research question of this study is **how conflict in Liptako-Gourma has affected mobility patterns, such as migration, displacement and transhumance, and with what consequences for migrants and other vulnerable populations.** The sub-questions are:

1. What has been the effect of deepening conflict on transborder mobility and migration routes? What is the link between mobility and VEOs? Are migrants being recruited by VEOs, and to what extent is human smuggling used to finance VEOs and other armed groups?
2. What types of abuse do migrants and other vulnerable populations suffer at the hands of conflict actors, what type of protection is needed, and how could humanitarian and development actors (including international institutions and NGOs) providing protection to vulnerable populations best respond to these protection needs in regions where they have no – or limited – access due to the unravelling security situation?

THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON MOBILITY PATTERNS

Mobility in Liptako-Gourma takes many different shapes and forms, as (circular) migration has always been a part of traditional lifestyles. The key forms of mobility that can be distinguished are: 1) displacement; 2) transhumance pastoralism, 3) local and regional trade and labour mobility, and 4) north-bound migration.[1]

The study demonstrates that the conflict in the region has different effects on these various forms of mobility. The most pressing issue related to mobility in the region is the forced displacement of the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled their homes in search of safety, protection and access to basic goods. The absence of state security and service provision, combined with the lack of humanitarian aid in rural areas on the borders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, has forced civilians to relocate to safer areas within their countries.

Some civilians have also found refuge across borders. While 25,871 Malians have found refuge in Burkina Faso and 58,442 in Niger, for example, 1,024 Nigerien and 8,457 Burkinabe refugees have fled to Mali. The number of IDPs is even more staggering, with 1,002,502 in the entire Liptako-Gourma in February 2020.

The impact of conflict on other forms of mobility is highest for local populations and transhumance pastoralists. With the rise of insecurity, an increasing number of people have become afraid to engage in local mobility. The growing use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) across Liptako-Gourma has disrupted travelling and trading routes, as well as the local population's freedom of movement. The states of emergency – along with regulations of the use of vehicles and motorbikes – imposed in all the border regions have complicated population movements across the borders. This finding applies to transhumance pastoralists and migrants engaging in local and regional trade and labour mobility alike.

There does not seem to be a persistent correlation – be it positive or negative - between insecurity and northbound migration flows in the Liptako-Gourma region. To date, conflict dynamics in the region do not appear to have given rise to an increase in the number of migrants travelling to Europe. Europe-bound migrants constitute only a small percentage of those in transit through Liptako-Gourma to begin with, and also a small portion of total arrivals in Europe. The West African share of arrivals dropped from 22.5% (2018) to 8% (Sept. 2019). It has been in constant decline since the adoption of anti-smuggling legislation in Niger in 2016 as well as the decrease in departures from the Libyan coast over the last couple of years. The relative share of arrivals in Europe from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso has been low consistently between 2016 and 2019, with Malians constituting 3% of arrivals in 2019 (Jan-Sept.) and Nigerien and Burkinabe migrants and refugees less than 0.1%.

A review of available data shows that the decision to undertake the migration journey, in particular the long-haul one to Europe (which is still a relatively small percentage of the total number of migratory movements), is more based on material and practical considerations than on the security situation on the ground. The factors that could potentially alter one's determination to migrate mostly refer to actual material obstacles, including enhanced border controls and lack of funds, far more than to perceptions about the possible risks of death or sanctions as a result of anti-migration legislation. This suggests that the decision to start a migratory route relies more on the actual possibility of travel rather than on the security situation on the route.

While the roads used by migrants have grown more dangerous because of the proliferation of IEDs, VEOs and intercommunal conflict, the trajectories and flows have not changed commensurate to the changing security context, except in such areas where overall mobility is hindered due to increasing border controls or other checkpoints. The routes used in Mali to transport migrants to northern regions and to Algeria have shifted to a certain degree. Transporters and transportation companies continue to travel on axes passing through the Sahel and Est regions of Burkina Faso on to Niamey. The duration of the trip from Bamako to Gao is now longer due to insecurity, the need for a military convoy and the resultant implementation of checkpoints on the route, which has increased the vulnerability and costs for those travelling on this route.[2] As a result, in addition to the main axis from Bamako to Gao, the route has shifted in the direction of Timbuktu, opening up an additional northbound path.

Map 1: Main transit routes passing through Liptako-Gourma
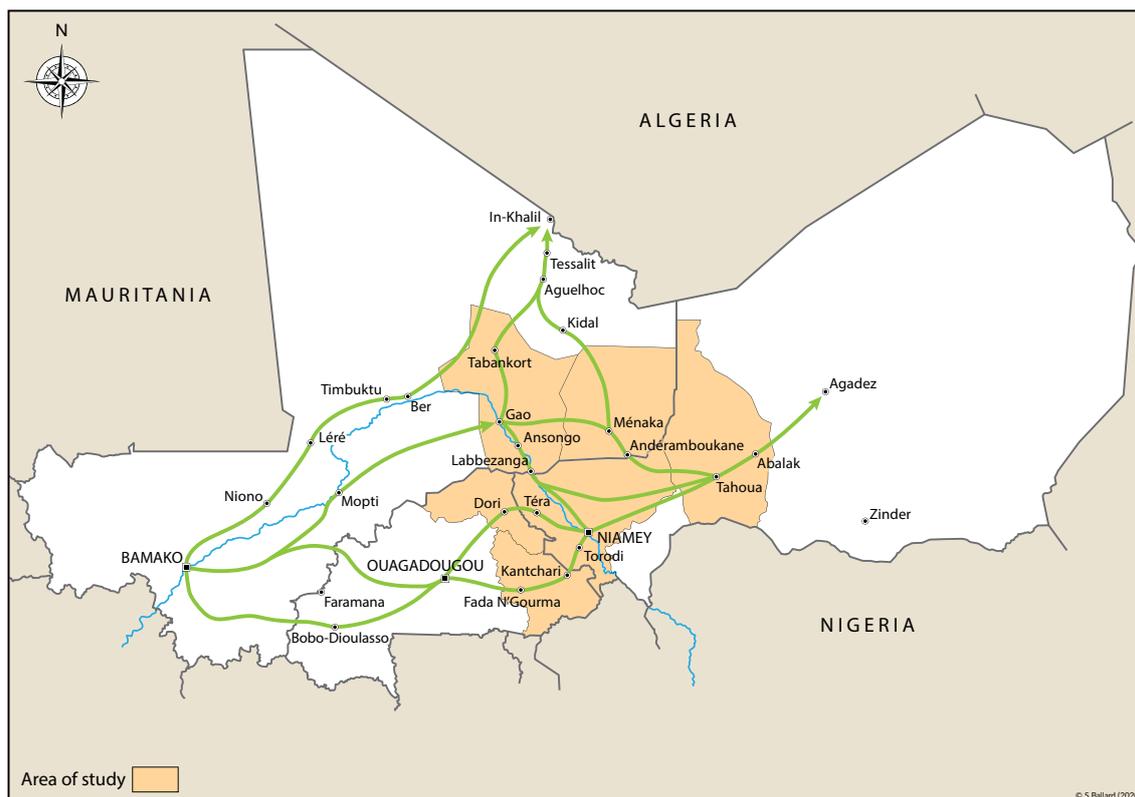
VULNERABILITY OF MIGRANTS TO ABUSE FROM STATE AND NON-STATE (ARMED) ACTORS

People on the move in Liptako-Gourma face multiple risks from various actors (see Table 1 below for an overview). They are subject to a variety of protection incidents on the route, the most common being extortion – which affects different forms of mobility, and not exclusively long-haul migrants. Also, extortion more or less affects men and women in the same manner. Other protection incidents are related to abuse, robbery and detention. Here, women are overall more vulnerable (especially to sexual and physical abuse and robbery).

This study further unpacked the link between VEOs and migrants by looking at migrants' potential recruitment by VEOs and the relationship between VEOs and human smuggling networks. International and national actors interviewed could not confirm the exploitation and recruitment of migrants by VEOs operating in Liptako-Gourma or their involvement in the human smuggling industry. This is in line with the findings from other studies on VEOs' financial strategies, which indicate that VEOs in Liptako-Gourma typically rely on more lucrative illicit trafficking activities, such as drugs, to finance their activities. Our analysis of migrants' vulnerability on conflict-affected roads does show that members of the CMA and Platform, the armed signatories to the peace agreement in northern Mali, are linked to smugglers and to the exploitation of migrants – either by providing human smugglers with access to the territories under their control and/or by actively profiting from the vulnerable position of migrants at road blocks by asking for money.

More importantly, the increase in insecurity and border enforcement in the region have resulted in an increase in state security forces seeking to control movement through the region. Increased security control due to the counter-terrorist agenda and the implementation of border security and anti-smuggling measures, further compounded by efforts to control undocumented migration, provide security forces with opportunities for the extortion of bribes from migrants. In fact, state security forces are among the key perpetrators of migrant abuse in all three countries studied here. This results in fear of security forces which in turn may force people on the move to deviate from major routes and avoid controls, to rely more on smugglers.

Table 1: Migrants' vulnerability on the different conflict-affected routes – summary of report findings

Trajectory	Effect of conflict on routes	Issues/ dangers/ risks	Main perpetrators
Mali			
Bamako–Gao via Mopti	The journey became expensive and longer. This is due to required military escort between Gossi and Gao.	■ The use of IEDs by militant groups, especially between Gossi and Gao. ■ Extortion by security forces at checkpoints.	■ Security forces: police, military and gendarmes. ■ Drivers and coxers between Gossi and Gao.
Gao–In-Khalil	Other than violence conducted by VEOs, the area has seen notable stability. Migrants will attempt to avoid this route due to high number of checkpoints by multiple actors rather than to conflict.	■ Extortion of money by Malian security forces and armed groups who are signatories of the peace accord at checkpoints. ■ Rape and physical abuse by members of armed groups. ■ Being abandoned in the desert. ■ The use of IEDs by VEOs.	■ Malian security forces. ■ Armed groups who are signatories of the peace accord. ■ Smugglers.
Niamey–Gao–Niamey via Ansongo (Mali part)	Remains and will remain key transit route for migrants, other passengers, and goods in both directions.	■ Armed banditry against all passengers. ■ The use of IEDs by VEOs especially on the Malian side. ■ Extortion of money by Malian security forces.	■ Malian security forces: customs, gendarmes, military and police. ■ VEOs; however, they are not specifically targeting migrants. ■ Armed bandits.
Gao–Tahoua–Agadez via Ménaka and Andéramboukane (Mali) (Mali part)	Not a major route used by migrants trying to reach Algeria or Libya. Avoided because it is dangerous and used by limited number of transporters.	■ Migrants and passengers travelling through this route face constant armed robberies.	■ Armed bandits. ■ Malian security forces. ■ Armed groups who are signatories of the peace accord.

Trajectory	Effect of conflict on routes	Issues/ dangers/ risks	Main perpetrators
Niger			
Bamako–Niamey via Burkina Faso (Niger part)	Route is becoming more attractive for migrants to avoid the lengthy and more expensive Bamako – Gao route.	▪ Money extortion at checkpoints controlled by Nigerien forces.	▪ Nigerien security forces.
Niamey–Gao– Niamey via Ansongo (Niger part)	Route still used to transport migrants, passengers in general, and goods despite ongoing conflicts on both sides of the borders. Malian security forces abandoned border crossing town Labbezanga due to insecurity, leaving travelling migrants exposed and vulnerable.	▪ Money extortion by security forces and armed groups at checkpoints. ▪ Armed banditry and robberies. ▪ Possible exploitation by VEOs, though difficult to confirm.	▪ Nigerien security forces. ▪ VEOs: mainly Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).
Gao–Tahoua– Agadez via Ménaka and Andéramboukane (Mali) (Niger part)	The number of migrants, and population movement in general, passing through this route is relatively low due to high acts of criminality, presence of multiple armed groups, and VEOs.	▪ Money extortion at different checkpoints. ▪ Possible exploitation by VEOs, though difficult to confirm.	▪ Nigerien security forces. ▪ Armed bandits.
Burkina Faso			
Bamako–Niamey via Burkina Faso (Burkina part)	Route is becoming more attractive for migrants to avoid the lengthy and more expensive Bamako– Gao route.	▪ Money extortion at checkpoints controlled by Burkinabe forces: gendarmes, military and customs.	▪ Burkinabe forces. ▪ VEOs: especially ISGS. ▪ Self-defence groups: Kolweogo.

ACCESSING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN LIPTAKO-GOURMA

Humanitarian and development actors providing protection to vulnerable populations currently have a limited presence in and access to Liptako-Gourma. Increased instances of violent conflict provide the main impediment to access: there is a high level of targeting of humanitarian workers and other actors engaged in providing aid. Incidents include armed robberies, car hijacking, physical attacks and the deliberate targeting of aid workers by armed groups. This situation is further compounded by the fact that the humanitarian/protection space has become narrowed down by the imposition of states of emergency and curfews. This has put heightened pressure on the actors working in the region, and has left them with less time to establish trust with communities in need.

Additional obstacles to accessing vulnerable populations come from the aid system itself. First of all, there is an overall lack of funding which limits the provision of aid and the scope of humanitarian access. Second, the situation in Liptako-Gourma represents a multi-faceted crisis that requires simultaneous humanitarian assistance, security intervention and development aid. While all three components have crucial importance at the current moment, they come with very different modalities of intervention (in terms of both approach and required duration). Differing approaches seem to create problems in terms of negotiating access, particularly for aid groups that might take longer to adjust from development to humanitarian mind-sets. Implementing the humanitarian principle of neutrality, for instance, requires them to distance themselves from their long-term governmental partners. Hence, there is a need for enhanced coordination and alignment between the various aid components active in the region.

In particular, the study finds that there is a need to balance the crisis-response more effectively with development and stabilization efforts. Across the board, respondents indicate that while the humanitarian needs are pressing, it is actually the underlying conflict drivers that require the most attention to prevent the situation from deteriorating further – including in terms of assuring access to the most vulnerable populations. When questioned about the most pressing needs in the region, almost all interviewed humanitarian and development actors (including international institutions and NGOs) mentioned the need to find solutions to issues pertaining to governance, transhumance, and informal gold mining in Liptako-Gourma, especially on the Nigerien and Burkina Faso borders. Although it was not this report's purview to study conflict dynamics in the region exhaustively, the findings in the report confirm that these issues need to be addressed, as they constitute key drivers of conflict and insecurity – and hence drive the increased need for protection in the region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the main findings, we would first and foremost urge international aid organizations to refrain from approaching mobility in Liptako-Gourma from a hard security and border enforcement angle. For now, most mobility in Liptako-Gourma takes the form of short-term and seasonal movement and not northbound migration, and targeting these flows as such risks further disrupting livelihoods and bolstering farmer–herder conflicts. Current efforts focusing on local population and IDPs are the right approach as an overt focus on migration would mean losing sight of larger priorities, of which strengthening state capacity and bridging the gap between the central state and the socio-economically marginalized communities living in the rural areas of Liptako-Gourma would be the key priority in terms of supporting sustainable peace and development.

Recommendation 1: The current obstruction of local mobility due to conflict dynamics severely affects local livelihoods. International aid actors should **establish an action plan based on the necessary steps that would allow them to bridge the gap between the central state and socio-economically marginalized communities in Liptako-Gourma**. In this current situation, the role and needs of beneficiaries –local communities and displaced populations – concerning better public services, fair access to land and natural

resources, governance should be the main objective of programing in the region. In addition, programmes should focus on the restoration of ruptured relations with security forces. Subsequent steps to be considered should include ensuring accountability and compensation to individuals and families unfairly targeted by security forces. It goes without saying that support for such processes, and for longer-term development efforts, should take local dynamics into account.

At the same time, there are also opportunities for international aid actors to engage with perpetrators against people on the move in Liptako-Gourma. Specifically, there seems to be an opportunity for the EU to address the issue of security forces resorting to extortion and abuse:

Recommendation 2: Make protection of local civilian population and IDPs, including migrants passing through a key point in any discussions undertaken with security forces in the region. Given the dominant focus on (border) security, it is imperative that awareness is raised among members of the armed forces regarding the human rights of migrants, IDPs, refugees (and other citizens).[3] This should be part not only of migration- or border-related security collaboration but also of securitized counter-terrorism approaches.

Recommendation 3: Engage in talks with CMA/Platform leadership to discuss migrant protection and the need to make this part of the signatories' human rights strategies. The EU could leverage the key role played by EU Special Envoy Losada in the implementation of the Malian Peace Agreement towards this end.

Finally, there is room for improvement in terms of coordination and alignment of aid responses to the challenges in Liptako-Gourma.

Recommendation 4: Involve traditional authorities in the programming, taking into account existing difficulties. To safeguard and expand upon existing access it is essential for aid actors to foster acceptance and gain the trust of communities, including local and traditional authorities. Informing prominent community figures of distributions and projects to be implemented within their networks is essential to ensure their buy-in and support. By developing and maintaining a trusting relationship with these authorities, aid actors can access communities more easily and better understand their needs to ensure a tailored response. In turn, local and traditional authorities will be more willing to raise awareness among their communities about the role of aid actors and the humanitarian sector. However, it is important to recognize possible limitations and shortcomings of engagement with such authorities. Traditional chiefs have been increasingly targeted by VEOs in recent years, especially if they are perceived as allies of the state, which means that any engagement with such actors must be conflict sensitive and most likely discreet. Traditional figures are often targets because their removal would disrupt inter- and intra-community stability. It should be taken into consideration that overt dealings with aid and health workers could expose such individuals to greater risks of attacks and kidnapping. Humanitarian actors must, on the one hand, ensure that the traditional authorities they deal with comply with their core principles. On the other hand, they need to invest in awareness raising and information sharing concerning their neutrality.

Recommendation 5: International donors, such as the EU, could **provide support for better coordination – especially when it comes to negotiating access – among the various humanitarian and development actors providing protection to vulnerable populations.** The EU could also support its implementing partners in negotiations with national governments when reviewing the obligation to use military escorts. Care should be taken not to fall back on blueprint approaches and response plans for the region. There are overarching characteristics that are the same throughout Liptako-Gourma (current conflict and instability dynamics and their root causes), but blanket responses will not cut it. The humanitarian context is currently still quite different in Burkina Faso (very dire, parallel interventions needed) and Niger (state systems still more or less running, support through existing systems still possible).

There is an instant need to coordinate responses among the various humanitarian and development actors providing protection to vulnerable populations. Such coordination should start with a mapping exercise of mandates of the UN, international non-governmental organizations (INGOS) and the local NGOs that operate in the area. The reasons for this are twofold. First, when international organizations withdraw due to security risks, local NGOs are more likely to take over the provision of humanitarian assistance. Care should be taken to ensure they are properly trained and equipped to do this without putting their lives in danger as well. Second, some of these NGOs might come from a development or civil society organization background. If they are seen by the local population and/or by the VEOs to be operating as humanitarians, then their choices will have an impact on the perception of neutrality, humanity and independence of humanitarians more generally. This could potentially harm the safety of international aid providers when they (re)establish their presence in certain regions. Through the mapping exercise, these risks could be calculated.

ACRONYMS

AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
CSO	civil society organization
CMA	Coordination of Azawad Movements
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ECOWAS	Economic Community for West African States
EU	European Union
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
FMP	flow-monitoring point
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDPs	internally displaced people
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISWAP	Islamic State West African Province
JNIM	Jama't Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MLF	Macina Liberation Front
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VEO	violent extremist organizations
VHR	Voluntary Humanitarian Return

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1. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Liptako-Gourma, a region connecting the three countries of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, has drawn notable media and political attention in recent years. The area, which includes part of the Gao and Mopti regions of Mali, the Tillabéri region of Niger and the Sahel region of Burkina Faso,[4] is described as the epicentre of the crisis in the West Africa Sahel. In the absence of effective state presence, this tri-border region has been the theatre of heightened banditry and looting, intercommunal violence and attacks at the hand of violent extremist organizations (VEOs). The security landscape in Liptako-Gourma is characterised by the proliferation of non-state armed groups operating alongside weak state security forces and self-defence militias. The current conflict can be traced back to 2012, when VEOs seized control of northern Mali, exploiting the chaos caused by both the Tuareg rebellion and the political crisis that ensued. The conflict gradually expanded into parts of the Liptako-Gourma region in both Niger and Burkina Faso.

JNIM and ISGS/ISWAP are the two main armed coalitions in Liptako-Gourma. JNIM, is an umbrella coalition of al-Qaeda-aligned groups which aims to drive foreign forces (especially the French and the UN) out of the Sahel,[5] and to impose its version of Islamic law. Despite heavy losses in 2019, JNIM has carried out complex attacks, assassinations and IED attacks on UN personnel, local and French forces, and civilians.[6] The Katiba Macina Liberation Front, one of its component, has been linked to 63% of all violent events in central Mali and to a third of violent events in the whole of Mali in 2018.[7] Another coalition, ISGS/ISWAP, has gained influence in the Ménaka and Gao regions by gathering support among disadvantaged communities. The ISGS/ISWAP is the local branch of Islamic State. Through 2019, JNIM and ISGS/ISWAP expanded and intensified their operations in the Tillabéri region of Niger.[8] Both JNIM and ex-ISGS exploited resentment towards state actors as well as local grievances of some communities to fuel inter- and intra-community tensions as a way to strengthen their presence and influence in the region and generate support.[9] They have attempted to present themselves as social and political actors by developing normative discourses and practices.[10] By endorsing feelings of injustice and discrimination widespread among the Muslim-majority Fulani, armed groups used local grievances as a focus to generate cohesion.[11] As a result, Fulani communities continue to be stigmatized and victimized because they are seen as key supporters of JNIM or ISWAP groups by security forces and self-defence militias operating under the pretext of fighting VEOs.[12] In 2019, intercommunal violence in Mali surpassed the violence from VEOs, according to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.[13] The competition over resources and the added stress and risks to livelihoods emanating from climate change and population growth have contributed to exacerbated social frictions.[14] Because of violence and targeted assassinations by VEOS, traditional leaders and authorities have fled and/or have been killed, creating a vacuum in mediation and resolution of disputes.[15]

The security crisis is compounded by weak and poorly trained state security forces. They suffer regular attacks by VEOs and have little control over state territory. In November 2019, Malian forces suffered its deadliest attacks by ISGS in the Ménaka area (In-Delimane) that left at least 53 Malian soldiers dead.[16] As a result, the Malian army withdrew from its positions near the borders with Niger and Burkina Faso.[17] In Burkina Faso, security forces have been driven away from the country's Sahel, Centre-Nord and Est regions. In areas where they do patrol, they only do so during the day before retreating to safer areas by nightfall for fear of attacks by VEOs.[18] In Niger, security forces in the Tillabéri region have come under constant attack from ISGS/ISWAP. From December 2019 to January 2020, more than 300 Nigerien soldiers were killed by VEO attacks in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions.[19] Security forces have quickly become overwhelmed, and seem to have lost control over their own operations, ignoring abuses and killings. Security forces in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have been responsible for indiscriminate targeting of certain communities they suspected to have supported VEOs, further fueling local grievances and intercommunal conflict. Early 2020, local NGOs reported multiple extrajudicial killings by Malian security forces of members of Fulani communities in the Mopti region.[20] In Burkina Faso, Humans Rights Watch documented 130 unjustified killings of detainees by Burkina Faso security forces.[21] In February 2020 in Niger, at least 10 civilians were killed by Nigerien forces in the Tillabéri region.[22] Abuses and extrajudicial killings carried out by security forces are likely to be exploited by extremists to breed resentment among communities and recruit new members.

Algerian foodstuff truck in Ménaka, Mali

Ethnic-based militias and armed groups have emerged under the pretext of protecting their communities, but claims of abuse, killings, and extortion by these militias against communities perceived to be collaborating with VEOs have been reported and documented.[23] In addition, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has also recorded atrocities perpetrated by local security forces against civilians.[24] This escalation of armed violence in the area has resulted in a massive displacement of populations and a severe humanitarian crisis.

The presence of self-defence militias, especially in Mali and Burkina Faso, underlines the inability of the state security forces to provide protection in rural and semi-urban areas, sustain operations, hold territory and provide a constant security presence, making self-defence militias appear indispensable to the government's security plan.[25] In Mali, Dozo hunters have acted as a self-defence force to protect the Bambara and Dogon against armed bandits and VEOs. In Burkina Faso, the Mossi-majority *Koglweogo* play a key role in the country's rural and semi-urban security infrastructure.[26] Both groups have long existed before the conflict as community-based defence groups, but rising insecurity and the emergence of VEOs paved the way for the Dozo hunters and *Koglweogo* to provide security and ensure the rule of law in rural Mali and Burkina Faso.[27] Although they have been formally recognized by the state early 2020, the government has no real control mechanisms or actual oversight over their actions.[28] Both militias have been implicated in repeated human rights abuses, such as extra judicial killings and assaults, particularly against Fulani civilians.[29]

In response to the security crisis, a state of emergency has been imposed in the border regions of the three countries, aiming to limit population movement across the borders. However, Liptako-Gourma is a borderland area where livelihoods, trade and lifestyles are organized around population movement. Whether as participants in seasonal and circular migration themselves, or as providers of services in transit areas, population movement constitutes one of the main ways for people to earn their livelihoods. This explains why, despite rampant conflict and insecurity, migrants have not been deterred from using established migration routes and human-smuggling networks to cross the region. Even though mixed migration flows across Liptako-Gourma have declined compared to the situation in 2015 (most likely due to the implementation of the law targeting migrant smuggling in Niger), it has been demonstrated that security considerations only have a very limited influence in determining the preferred routes and destinations of migrants.[30] At the same time, the increased presence and activities of VEOs and the subsequent security measures have disrupted humanitarian operations. Access to the most vulnerable populations is limited, and in certain cases simply not possible, and humanitarian actors report that some measures taken by authorities have interfered with humanitarian principles,[31] making it more difficult for them to provide protection where it might be most needed.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study explores these dynamics in more detail by answering the central research question: **How has conflict in Liptako-Gourma affected mobility patterns such as migration, displacement and trans-humance, and with what consequences for migrants and other vulnerable populations?**

The sub-questions for this study are:

1. What has been the effect of deepening conflict on trans-border mobility and migration routes? What is the link between mobility and VEOs? Are migrants being recruited by VEOs, and to what extent is human smuggling used to finance VEOs and other armed groups?

2. What types of abuse do migrants and other vulnerable populations suffer at the hands of conflict actors, what type of protection is needed, and how could humanitarian and development actors (including international institutions and NGOs) providing protection to vulnerable populations best respond to these protection needs in regions where they have no – or limited – access due to the unravelling security situation?

The purpose of the study is to provide fine-grained insights into the inter-linkages between mobility and conflict and thereby to provide direct input into ongoing programming efforts that seek to increase (migrant) protection and to counter human trafficking.

METHODOLOGY AND KEY CONCEPTS

The data collection for this study has been carried out in the period September 2019–February 2020, on the basis of a review of existing quantitative data (desk study) combined with key informant interviews with migrants, transporters, influential local leaders, humanitarian actors, CSOs, NGOs and international community actors present, operating and involved in conflict- and/or migration-related issues in Liptako-Gourma.

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase (September–November 2019) consisted of desk research and initial interviews in the capitals of Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali. The lead researcher met with local, regional and international humanitarian and development agencies to learn about these organizations' activities and work in the Liptako-Gourma region, their challenges, trends observed, and to identify how this study could be relevant to their work. In addition, the lead researcher met with the local research teams that were put together to conduct data collection in the Liptako-Gourma region. In each country a team consisting of local researchers either from or familiar with these regions was trained to conduct structured key informant interviews in selected data-collection sites. In principle, all researchers followed the same interview guide, which was developed by the lead researcher on the basis of the desk study and initial interviews, and finalized in coordination and collaboration with the local research teams – allowing them to tailor the interview guide to local circumstances and sensitivities.

Map 2: Area of study

The second phase of data collection and analysis took place between November 2019 and February 2020. In-depth interviews were conducted in the Liptako-Gourma region. In Niger, the data collection has focused on the towns of Tillabéri, Téra, Torodi, Abala, Diagourou, and Ayorou of the Tillabéri region; and Tillia and Tassara of the Tahoua region. In Mali, data collection focused on Ménaka, Andéramboukane, and Anouza-grene of the Ménaka region; and Gao, Tabankort, Tangara, Intililt, Tessit and Labbezanga of the Gao region. And finally in Burkina Faso, data collection focused on Djibo, Dori, Sebba, Gorom-Gorom of the Sahel region; and Fada-N'Gourma and Kantchari of the Est region. These data-collection sites were identified on the basis of relevance to the research focus and purpose, the security situation, and the availability and presence of key actors identified to be interviewed. It is worth noting that the local research teams experienced multiple operational challenges due to the rapidly deteriorating security situation, most notably in the Tillabéri region in Niger and the Sahel region in Burkina Faso. Military operations and the effects of the state of emergency throughout the region resulted in a delay in data collection and submission, while it also became increasingly difficult to reach actors we intended to interview.[32]

Actors identified and interviewed included humanitarian and development organizations, international and national NGOs, CSOs, state authorities, migrants, transporters and traditional leaders. A total of 120 in-depth interviews were conducted in the three countries. It is important to note that the amount of detail gathered differs from one region, and one country, to another. Additionally, participants demonstrated different levels

of knowledge about various themes or areas. These gaps prevented us from having overall detailed analysis of all dynamics surrounding mobility and violent conflicts in all the regions covered in the study. Hence, the analyses presented in this report are those that we were able to substantiate through data collected and triangulated against existing open-source reports.

The terminology used in this study to refer to different categories of mobility in the region identifies several categories of movement. Displaced people refers to both IDPs and refugees, and includes those not having received a formal status as well. Pastoralism and transhumance refer to movements by herders that move throughout the region in order to ensure sustained access to grazing and water for their livestock. Local and regional movements are identified as opportunities for trade and short- or longer-term access to labor markets, which may take place in the country of origin or require crossing one or several international borders. Finally, north bound or long-haul migration refers to the movement of people from throughout West Africa towards North Africa and Europe.

During the writing of this report, it became clear that it was challenging to analyze the developments in this specific geographical region without looking at other regions outside the Liptako-Gourma. For instance, we saw the need to focus on the movement of migrants between the town of Gao and Algerian borders in northern Mali as well. Hence, we have extended our geographical focus where it was necessary to strengthen the basis of the analysis. In general, the report focuses on the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions of Niger; the Sahel and Est regions of Burkina Faso; and the Gao and Ménaka regions of Mali.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report is organized in three main sections. The first section looks closely at the impact of conflict on mobility in the region. In order to explore different facets of mobility and different effects of conflict, this section will look at the most important routes going through Liptako-Gourma . The second covers vulnerability of migrants in Liptako-Gourma and looks at the protection incidents that people on the move may encounter. The third then discusses the challenges and opportunities of accessing vulnerable populations in Liptako-Gourma, and presents recommended strategies for aid programming in the region.

2. THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON MOBILITY

This section looks closely at the impact of conflict on mobility in Liptako-Gourma. We will explore the different facets of mobility in the region, and how it is affected by the current conflict. It examines whether, in the context of the Liptako-Gourma, conflict has led to an increase in the number of people on the move and assesses how the current conflict affects the most important routes going through the region.

MOBILITY IN LIPTAKO-GOURMA – AN OVERVIEW

The space and activities in Liptako-Gourma are defined to a great extent by the borders that lie at the heart of the region. It is also situated at the intersection of routes connecting North Africa, Sahel and coastal countries. As a result, large cross-border flows, of both people and goods, characterize mobility in Liptako-Gourma.[33] We make the stylistic distinction between 1) displacement, 2) transhumance pastoralism, 3) local and regional trade and labour mobility, and 4) north-bound migration.[34]

Displacement

Forced displacement of mass populations is one of the most visible consequences of violence and insecurity in the Liptako-Gourma. The social fabric of entire communities has been threatened following the assassination of village chiefs, community and religious leaders, and heads of households. 'Our villages are at risk of disappearing,' said a religious leader interviewed in Tillabéri. 'When the chief of a village is executed, the residents are also threatened and the only solution is to flee…Lately, entire villages have been deserted. People flee to safer places.'[35]

Vehicles in Ménaka used for transportation to and from Gao, Mali

The conflict in Liptako-Gourma has forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes in search of safety, protection, and access to basic goods. As families are forced to flee, they often leave behind their animals and fields, which are their main sources of livelihood, thereby becoming dependent on humanitarian aid and hosting communities to survive. The absence of state security and service provision, combined with the lack of sufficient humanitarian aid in rural areas on the borders of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso has forced civilians to typically relocate to urban areas, but also to relocate across borders.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) account for the majority of displaced populations in Liptako-Gourma, with a total of 1 002 502 IDPs in the entire region.[36] Overall, Burkina Faso concentrates the highest number of displaced persons with 63% of the total number across the tri-border area, followed by Mali with 22% and Niger with 15%.[37] In Mali, the region of Gao records the highest number of displaced persons as of January 2020 with about 73 000, followed by Gao (71 000).[38] In Burkina Faso, the Centre-Nord region hosts the largest number of displaced people – more than 196 000 in Sanmatenga province alone – followed by the Sahel region, with almost 133 000 in Soum province.[39] Here the large majority of internal displacement is preventive displacement (90%), with families and entire villages fleeing for fear of being attacked, while the rest is secondary displacement of already displaced persons in search of aid.[40] In Niger, the majority of IDPs are hosted in Tillabéri and Tahoua, with 57 700 and 23 100 respectively.[41] In addition, over 58 500 refugees from neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso found refuge in both regions (most having fled violence and military operations in northern Mali). Based on the current security context and rising violence, aid groups expect forced displacement in Tillabéri and Tahoua to continue in 2020 and to even increase drastically.[42]

> **Box 1: Secondary movement of displaced populations**
> Data collection for the research coincided with this rapid increase in displacement in the region. The preferred destination for displaced people remains unclear, other than refugee camps and host communities where displaced feel safe and have access to basic services. The UNHCR conducted research in 2018 on refugees' intended secondary movements in the Sahel region. The main conclusions were that employment and access to sufficient aid are key drivers for refugees to secondary movement, including migration. When asked about their destination for secondary movement, 17% of the 915 interviewees said Algeria, 11% said Niger, 10% said France, 7% said Mauritania, 6% said Libya, and 4% said Spain, Germany and Côte d'Ivoire.[43] Simultaneously, a majority of participants, about 87%, expressed no desire to move again.

Given the complexity and rapidly changing dynamics which characterize displacement fluxes, it remains difficult to assess the real number of people forced to flee due to rising insecurity and violence. For example, many Burkinabe will resist efforts to classify themselves as IDPs due to fear of targeting by extremist groups, or will opt to congregate in larger metropolitan areas rather than official IDP camps.[44] Moreover, it remains

uncertain if and when displaced families will be able to return. In the meantime, there is a risk their property will be seized as spoils of war, or indeed occupied by other displaced persons. Mediation over the access of land and property, compensation payment, and alternative solutions such as the construction of new dwellings will be key for the eventual large-scale return of IDPs. Finally, it is essential for communities and those forced to flee to access civil documentation to ensure freedom of movement and avoid raising suspicion of law enforcement – an issue brought up in several interviews conducted across the region.[45] Not possessing civil documentation disproportionately exposes some people – IDP men and boys in particular - to risks such as discrimination, arbitrary arrest, kidnapping and murder.[46]

Transhumance pastoralism

Pastoralism is a crucial economic sector in the Liptako-Gourma region, and thus, a structural determinant of mobility and population flows. It is estimated that pastoralism and the related livestock trade and products made up 15.2% of Mali's GDP.[47] It is also a key feature of the economic environment in eastern and northern Burkina Faso, where there are an estimated 9.3 million cattle, 9.8 million sheep, 14.7 million goats, and some 19,000 camels.[48] Similarly, farming, and particularly herding, provides a livelihood for around 80% of Niger's population.[49]

Box 2: Challenges to transhumance pastoralism

Pastoralism and transhumance are strongly influenced by the Sahel's topography, microclimates, and the distribution of rainfall across its different ecological zones. Transhumance in particular is determined by the availability and access of pasture and water, which is a function of local politics, economics, and social relations connected to land tenure and use, as much as local ecology.[50] Therefore one important challenge facing pastoralism – and by extension mobility and population flows in Liptako-Gourma – is the access to land and natural resources.

There are acute pressures on land, water, and livelihoods in many rural areas. In Niger, environmental changes, water scarcity and the reduction of grazable land in Tillabéri have disrupted a major livelihood for the populations in the region. The same goes for Burkina Faso, where population growth combined with adverse environmental and climatic conditions have also reduced the area of usable land. Pastoral land is not protected here, and much of what was allocated to pastoralists has been cultivated or taken over by other developments, including agriculture and plantations. As a result many pastoralists have left the country for neighboring countries further south, increasing pressures and tensions in other parts of West Africa. Those who have stayed find themselves increasingly embroiled in farmer-herder disputes.

In addition to ecological pressure and disputes over land management and access to resources (see Box 1 above), cross-border transhumance is also being disrupted by the increasing violence across the region. Aforementioned farmer-herder tensions are being exacerbated by VEOs and rising violence due to the presence of armed groups and IEDs along roads. In Mali, for example, transhumance into northern regions has been interrupted by the prevailing insecurity. Movement in southern regions still occurs,[51] but during interviews conducted in Intililt, herders admitted being afraid to travel with their animal because of road-side IEDs and the threat of robbery.[52] Some herders have reduced the distance they travel with their live-stock due to this insecurity and have avoided some grazing corridors for fear of being targeted.

Circular cross-border mobility continues despite the growing insecurity, but passengers are well aware of the risks en route. Respondents in Mali, including farmers and herders, said they were reducing the distance travelled on some roads or not travelling at all for fear of being targeted or being a collateral casualty.[53] One agro-pastoralist interviewed in Torodi, Niger - who had some of his livestock stolen by bandits – similarly stated: 'I no longer send my animals to graze beyond 40 kilometers from here. We no longer cross to Togo and Benin either.'[54] The enhanced security controls on the routes (at least before the retirement of the Labbezzanga border post) also complicate the conditions of travel.

Local and regional trade and labour mobility

Local and regional mobility is a well-established lifestyle and has considerable legitimacy both in the eyes of the local populations and of the authorities. Such legitimacy emanating from mobility patterns and the associated livelihoods created a situation in which enforcing borders was not the priority of states in the region. Since the independence of the three states, their borders therefore remained porous and poorly con-trolled. This was also due in part to the lack of clear border demarcation; the sheer magnitude of the border areas; and the lack of state capacity to control them.

Indeed, in a region with limited resources, lack of employment, insecurity and suffering from harsh climatic conditions, medium- and short-term mobility represents an important resilience strategy for the popula-tion,[55] resulting in a rural youth exodus. In Burkina Faso, for example, in recent years many young people from the Sahel communes of Dori, Djibo, Sebba and Gorom-Gorom have migrated to large urban centres such as Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso for small survival jobs.[56] Senegalese and Nigerien workers travel to Gao, Mali to work in construction while traders move between markets in Liptako-Gourma to buy and sell goods.[57] These forms of internal and cross-border mobility are a social norm and a well-established practice in the region, and also beyond Liptako-Gourma.

The general consensus among our interview respondents is that moving within the region for economic, cultural and family reasons is more common among local populations than trying to reach North Africa and/ or Europe.[58] Such short- and medium-term mobility may consist of rural–rural and rural–urban migration on a seasonal and circular basis, thereby diversifying local economies and sources of income.[59] The most important recent mobility trends, as confirmed in our interviews in multiple locations in Liptako-Gourma, are migration towards artisanal mining areas,[60] moving to the bigger urban centres in search of employment,[61] and engaging in seasonal migration for agricultural work.[62] In the case of Burkina Faso, for example, artisanal gold mining in the Sahel and Est regions of the country has made the area attractive to youth from neighbouring West African countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal, Benin and Togo.[63]

Box 3: Gold mining and seasonal migration in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, gold-mining sites have become a major draw for both Burkinabe and labourers from neighbouring countries. The Liptako region is rich in bedrock formation. In 2017 Burkinabe authorities identified 448 sites for gold mining yielding about 11 tons of gold annually. The spectre of unemployment, combined with the rise in international gold prices, pushed local Burkinabes to migrate to these sites with the hope of improving their economic prospects.[64] According to a study conducted by IOM on the gold-mining sites of Warweogo and Galgouli in March and April 2019, the large majority of workers (97%) on both sites were Burkinabe from the same region of Sud-Ouest and the neighbouring regions of Nord, Centre-Nord and Plateau Central. Foreign workers come from neighbouring countries of Central and West Africa. According to the study, close to 1 million people are living from gold digging.[65]

As detailed in Box 3, long- and short-distance patterns of mobility, despite their different destinations and causes, often overlap. Long-distance migrants often have to break their journeys at different stages, staying in urban centres on the road and trying to earn money in order to continue the journey. According to the Mixed Migration Center, some 25% of people in mixed migration flows working during their journey in order to finance the next stage.[66] There are numerous examples of this trend, for instance, migrants from Ménaka trying to reach Algeria will head to Kidal for seasonal work.[67] A similar trend is also mentioned for migrants from the Ménaka area travelling to Tahoua through Andéramboukane and then to Agadez in Niger, where they hope to find seasonal work, such as farming or construction work, before continuing on their journey.[68] Many journeys are fragmented and non-linear in many places across the region, and in Liptako-Gourma specifically.

Box 4: Migration flows in Liptako-Gourma [69]

IOM reports that during the period between June 2016 and April 2018 more than 125 642 migrants (36 981 incoming and 88 661 outgoing) were observed at flow-monitoring points (FMPs) in Mali.[70] Among those who undertake long-term travel, only around 15–20% have one of the European countries as their intended destination.[71] All the others travel in and to Mali, to other countries in West Africa, and to Algeria. The destination country and countries of origin of migrants change according to the interview point. For instance, those interviewed in Bamako predominantly travel to another destination in Mali, to Mauritania or Niger. Migrants transiting through Benena and Heremanoko FMPs travel on to Burkina Faso, while those transiting through Gogui FMP travel on to Mauritania.

According to IOM's displacement-tracking matrix (DTM),[72] during the last quarter of 2019 the majority of migration flows observed in and out of Burkina Faso are the result of seasonal and short-term migration (less than six months): 36% relate to seasonal movements, 32% are short-term movements and 30% are long-term economic migration. Similar and comparable percentages were also observed during the first and second quarters of 2019. These observations affirm that the majority of flows transiting Burkina Faso in 2019 consisted of short-term and seasonal movement (at least 60%) and long-term economic migration represented around 30% of migrants.

IOM's DTM[73] reports that during the fourth quarter of 2019 the majority of migratory flows in and out of Niger consisted of seasonal migration and short-term migration (less than six months): 35% relate to seasonal migration, 26% are short-term migration and 39% are long-term economic movements. During the first three quarters of 2019, similar and comparable percentages were observed. These observations affirm that the majority of flows transiting Niger in 2019 consisted of short-term and seasonal movement (at least 60%) and long-term economic migration represented 39% of migrants.

North-bound migration

Next to displacement, transhumance, and local and regional trade and labour mobility, the Liptako-Gourma region is also a transit region connecting West Africa to North Africa, from where some migrants travel onwards to Europe. Survey data collected by the Mixed Migration Centre in 2019 indicated that, despite the ongoing conflict in the region, the majority of the transiting migrants and refugees do not originate from the region itself. Instead, the majority of migrants and refugees transiting through Liptako-Gourma are of West African origin, with Malians and Burkinabe constituting 22% and 9% respectively of the surveyed transiting migrants and refugees (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Main country of origin of refugees and migrants transiting through Liptako-Gourma
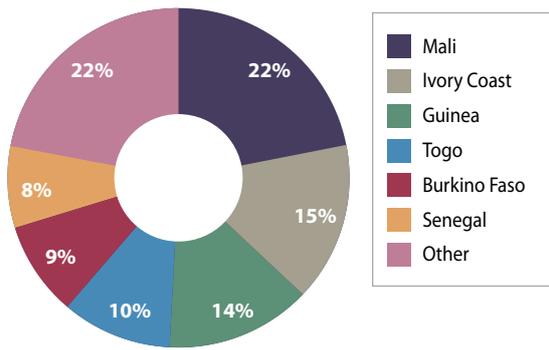
Source: Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel: Border Security Governance and Mixed Migration in Liptako-Gourma*, 2019, p. 55, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/083_navigating_borderlands.pdf

UNHCR data similarly show that, despite Liptako-Gourma being an important regional transit area, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso represent a small portion of the ever-decreasing number of the migrants and refugees arriving to Europe. As indicated in Table 2, the relative share of arrivals in Europe from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso has been a relatively stable and low number between 2016 and 2019, while the total number of migrant and refugee arrivals dropped significantly during that time period. Overall, northbound migration to Europe from and via the Liptako-Gourma can thus be considered marginal in absolute terms and arrival figures in Europe do not show an increase in migrants and refugees that could be tied to the Liptako-Gourma conflict.

Table 2: Migration from selected West African countries to Europe (as percentage of overall)

	Mali (% of total arrivals)	Niger (% of total arrivals)	Burkina Faso (% of total arrivals)	Nigeria (% of total arrivals)	West Africa (% of total arrivals)	Total migrant and refugee arrivals to Europe
2019 (Jan.–Sept. only)	3%	Less than 0.1%	Less than 0.1%	0.2%	8%	81 300
2018	8%	0.2%	0.8%	0.8%	22.5%	141 500
2017	4%	0.2%	0.5%	10%	21%	178 500
2016	2.7%	1%	0.2%	10%	16%	362 376

Based on UNHCR data on refugees and migrant arrivals to Europe from 2016 to 2019

When looking at migrant decision making processes, conflict and insecurity do not seem to deter migrants from selecting their itineraries through the region. Indeed, when assessing the effect of conflict on the choice of the route taken by migrants, the existing 4Mi data makes clear that this choice is largely determined by material considerations, including primarily accessibility (mentioned by 68% of the respondents) and affordability (49% of the respondents), followed by safety (40% of the respondents). Two-thirds (66%) of interviewed migrants acknowledged that they had not changed their migration route to avoid security forces.[74] There are some differences in choice of route based on the gender of respondents: women tend to rely far more on existing family networks (64%) than men (38%) when deciding their travel itineraries. These findings are also consistent with the results about the factors that could potentially alter one's intention to migrate. These mostly refer to actual material obstacles, including enhanced border controls (mentioned by 43% of the respondents) and lack of funds (50%), far more than to perceptions about the possible risks of death (22%) or sanctions as a result of anti-migration legislation (26%).[75]

From the above, it follows that there does not seem to be a persistent correlation – be it positive or negative – between insecurity and northbound migration flows in the Liptako-Gourma region.

Box 5: Returning migrants

Another quite recent, but always increasing, flow passing through Liptako-Gourma is the flow of returning migrants, predominantly from Niger and Libya, and to a lesser extent from Algeria. These returns are of a diverse nature: individual, group and/or organized by IOM as part of their voluntary return programmes. These programmes offer migrants unable or unwilling to remain in their host or transit countries to return to their countries of origin. This is a direct result of the increased difficulty that migrants encounter on the voyage from Libya to Europe, the deterioration of living conditions for migrants in Libya and severe human rights violations, and migrant deportations from Algeria to Mali and Niger.

A comprehensive analysis of the evolution of return flows throughout the region is impossible with the limited amount of data that exists. The number of migrants making use of from IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return procedure has been increasing however since 2012.[76] The number of returns from Niger rose from 1 322 in 2015 to 14 977 in 2018, which coincides with the 2015 anti-smuggling law and the 2014 agreement between Niger and Algeria that resulted in the deportation of scores migrants across the Algerian–Niger border. Most among the deported are nigerien citizens but often waves also include citizens from across West Africa deciding to return to their home country.[77] While voluntary return programmes remain small scale in Algeria, IOM reports that migrants have increasingly started using its return mechanisms in Libya.[78]

EFFECT OF CONFLICT ON MIGRATION ROUTES

As the above has shown, large cross-border flows, both of people and goods, characterize mobility in the Liptako-Gourma region. The routes that pass through the region connect capitals such as Bamako, Ouagadougou and Niamey and more generally link coastal West Africa with the Sahel and further on to North Africa.

The main urban centres located in Liptako-Gourma are Dori and Djibo in Burkina Faso, Gao in Mali and Tillabéri in Niger. Gao is the capital of the Gao region and is the major centre linking Mali to Algeria (via In-Khalil). The other two – Dori and Tillabéri – can be considered migration hubs at a more local level. While they sit on major road axes such as Ouagadougou–Niamey and Niamey–Gao, they do not represent regional migration hubs. Most of the international buses travelling on these roads make only intermediate stops there. Depending on their mobility and economic capacity, the majority of international migrants make short stops there, while those heading for Tillabéri or Dori are mostly cross-border and local migrants, most likely choosing different transport options and different mobility patterns.

Bamako–Gao–Algeria

Despite the continuing insecurity in its northern and central regions, Mali remains a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants. The increased violence in central Mali has severely disrupted routes between Bamako and Gao, traditionally used by transportation companies to reach the north of the country.[79] The main route connecting Bamako to northern Mali goes through Mopti onward to Gao. Military convoys accompany civilian vehicles and buses from Hombori (Mopti region) up to Gao to protect them from banditry and road blocks. The other option that has become somewhat more popular in the recent times is to travel from Ségou to Timbuktu.[80] Departing from both cities, Gao and Timbuktu, migrants pass through Ber, Anéfis, Kidal and Tessalit before crossing to the Algerian towns of Borj Badji Mokhtar or Timiaouine.[81] Migrants leaving from Gao pay between FCFA 50 000 and FCFA 80 000 (€76–€121) to reach the town of In-Khalil, on the Algerian border.[82]

The majority of outgoing migrants identified at the Gao and Timbuktu FMPs who continue through Algeria pass through the Algerian towns of Tamanrasset and Bordj. Another route passing through Timbuktu links border towns of Bassikounou and Fassala in Mauritania through Léré on the Malian side of the border. From Léré, migrants are transported to Timbuktu to continue onward to Algeria. From Timbuktu to the Algerian border, Arab traders and Tuareg drivers transporting goods from Algeria to Timbuktu play a key role in facilitating the transportation of migrants. Migrants travelling along the Bamako–Timbuktu–In-Khalil route, as well as the Mauritania–Timbuktu–In-Khalil trajectory pay between FCFA 200 000 and FCFA 400 000 (€305–€610) to reach the Algerian border.[83] According to the IOM's DTM data, around 95% of those interviewed in Timbuktu travel to elsewhere in Mali and only 5% travel to Algeria. This number indicates that although some people do use this route to reach Algeria, it does not represent a major centre of transit for Algeria. Gao remains the most important transit hub and is commonly favoured by migrants for its access to routes leading to the Mediterranean.

Map 3: Main transit routes through Mali

Although northern Mali has limited state presence, it is still part of the ECOWAS, and free-movement pro-tocol is in place. For this reason, many long-distance migrants travel to Gao without using smugglers. Each journey is individual and highly dependent on migrants' networks and economic capacity. This is also true for the type of payment that migrants choose: some pay upfront, some pay for each leg of a journey. Not all people engaging in long-haul travel have enough resources to pay for the trip. Besides that, numerous checkpoints on the road should also be counted in the overall price of a journey. Hence, migrants may also have been anticipating multiple stops along the way to earn money to pay for the journey.

Although in the current security situation the trips become more costly and dangerous, the leg from the countries of origin to Bamako and from Bamako to Gao is significantly safer than from Gao to Algeria through the Sahara Desert. From Gao onwards, state presence is very limited between Gao and Tabankort, and totally absent from Anéfis to the Algerian border. On the road between Gao and the Algerian border, roadblocks are numerous. There is a total of ten checkpoints which are controlled by at least six different actors: Malian

security forces, the CMPFR-1 (or Ganda Izo/'Lords of the Land', an armed group from northern Mali), the Coalition of the Movement of Azawad (CMA), the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA), Imghad Tuareg Self-Defence Group and Allies (GATIA), and the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA).

To reach In-Khalil, migrants' transporters pass through Tin Aoukar, Kassambare, Tangara/Al-Moustarat, Tabankort, Anéfis, Markouba, Anou Malan, In-Kadawaten, and In-Khalil.[84] There are two alternative routes after Anéfis through Kidal. Drivers either pass through Aguelhoc, Tessalit and Talhandak before entering Timiaouine in Algeria, or straight from Kidal to Tinzaouaten.[85] In In-Khalil and Talhandak, migrants who travel on credit can become victims of forced labour before their passage to Algeria – especially those who cannot get in touch with their families to make money transfers, or whose families are too poor to send money.[86]

Bamako–Ouagadougou–Niamey

In response to the difficulties on the Bamako–Gao route, many long-haul migrants choose longer routes to bypass central Mali.[87] The Bamako–Ouagadougou–Niamey trajectory seems to be the most used by northbound migrants.[88] Indeed, despite migration flows being extremely volatile, the Bamako–Niamey route via Burkina Faso appears to be well established according to IOM DTM data of December 2019 (based on four main FMPs along this trajectory). However, it remains unclear if this is the preferred and most practised route by migrants trying to reach Niamey in Niger. The IOM's FMPs are positioned in south-east Mali on the border with Burkina Faso (Benena and Heremanoko), and another two in Burkina Faso on the border with Niger (Seytenga in the Sahel region and Kantchari in the Est region). Migrants starting their journey in Bamako take buses that go through Bogouni and Sikasso, crossing into Burkina Faso and continuing on to Bobo-Dioulasso, then Ouagadougou, from where they continue to Kantchari or Seytenga and then enter Niger.

Although there are some seasonal differences and patterns of mobility, DTM quarterly reports provide quite consistent information throughout the year about major countries of origin of interviewed migrants within Burkina Faso. In the last quarter of 2019 IOM DTM accounted for an average of 1 450 migrants exiting Burkina Faso per day. People travelling through Burkina Faso were mostly from the neighbouring countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. The most common nationalities interviewed are Burkinabe nationals and nationals of Niger.[89] Most of the flows from Burkina Faso to Niger registered by DTM are short-term local movements and seasonal migrations.

Until recently Kantchari was the most important crossing at the border with Niger. Flows in transit through Kantchari peaked in 2015 and 2016. As a consequence, IOM started an awareness-raising campaign and installed a MIDAS system at the border post in order to sensitize local populations to irregular border crossings. Furthermore, the degradation of the road passing through Fada-N'Gourma, combined with the volatile security situation in the east of Burkina Faso, have moved the flows to Dori and Seytenga. Additionally, while the Est region has seen less violence by VEOs than the Sahel region, it was pointed out by participants that the transit route between Fada-N'Gourma and Kantchari is under constant threat by VEOs, making it less attractive to transportation companies. In one of its country operation updates released in July 2018, the

UNHCR in Niger reported that VEO fighters had installed a new base in the forest of Kodjoga Beli along the Kantchari–Torodi axis.[90] This information was confirmed by the respondents interviewed in Kantchari. They affirmed that VEOs control some rural areas between Kantchari and Torodi.[91]

In 2016 Seytenga saw monthly flows of about 10 000 people (admissions and exits combined) including Burkinabe, Nigerien, Malian, Mauritanian, Ivorian, Beninese, Togolese, Chadian and Pakistani citizens.[92] Consequently, UEMOA sponsored the construction of a juxtaposed border post in Seytenga that was supposed to host both police and gendarmes.[93] From 2018 to 2019 between 7 and 11% of all people leaving Burkina Faso travelled via Seytenga and Kantchari respectively. According to DTM, in the second half of 2019 the Dori–Seytenga road remained the more travelled option.

Most migrants entering Niger via Seytenga head to Téra (in Niger) or those entering from Kantchari head towards Torodi. Migrants travelling with formal transportation companies pass on to Niamey. Based on interviews conducted in Téra, some migrants might leave the buses at Téra and try to reach Tahoua via Tillabéri city without entering Niamey. However, transport options are limited and expensive compared to reaching Niamey and travelling to Agadez via established transportation companies.[94] According to the IOM's DTM data, people travelling via Seytenga were mostly heading to Niamey (85%), Téra (5%) and Nigeria (10%), while those passing through Kantchari were going to Niamey (90%), as well as various neighbouring Nigerian towns (10%).

Furthermore, the nature of travel varies significantly between two border posts. In Kantchari, less than 5–10% of interviewees reported travelling for more than six months, 60% reported local short-term movements and around 20% were realizing seasonal migrations (highly dependent on the season). On the contrary, up to 30% of those travelling via Seytenga were travelling for more than six months, while the rest were realizing short-term local movements and seasonal migrations. Seytenga appears to be the preferred route for long-distance economic migration, while Kantchari is predominantly a local migration hub. According to the survey conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre (2019) in Dori (Sahel region), both male and female migrants interviewed by 4Mi predominantly came from Ivory Coast and Togo, as well as from Burkina Faso itself.[95] Overall, the IOM DTM data clearly points out to a Bamako–Niamey route used by migrants, passing via Heremanoko in Mali and Seytenga (and to a lower extent Kantchari) in Burkina Faso.[96]

The deterioration of the security situation means that both routes gradually become more dangerous. This has greatly affected the circulation of vehicles, including humanitarian cars and trucks to deliver aid, and the movement of traders, herders and farmers travelling to markets. Crisis Watch reports, for example, that suspected ISGS militants attacked a gendarmerie checkpoint in Seytenga on the road leading to Dori on 4 December 2018. Three gendarmes were wounded.[97] Specific incidents targeting transporters and migrants have been reported, but recent interviews have made it clear that transportation companies are increasingly wary of servicing this road due to increased presence of VEOs. Nevertheless, the respondents stated that the road remains safer for them than the one through the Est region.[98] In fact, in November 2019 thirty-seven persons were killed and sixty wounded as a result of an attack on a Canadian mining convoy near Fada-N'Gourma.[99]

Map 4: Main transit routes through Burkina Faso to reach Niger
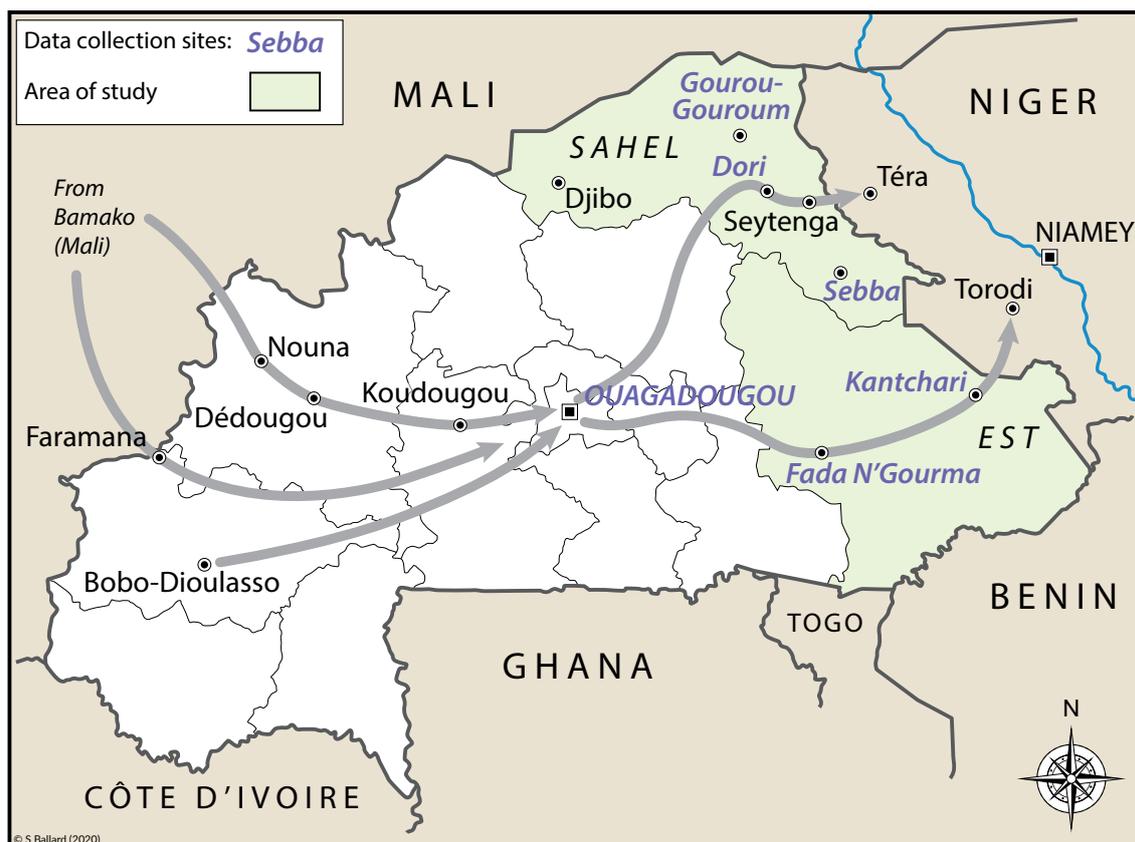
Since 2016 a total of eighty-nine IED incidents have been recorded in Burkina Faso, including the Sahel and Est regions, with a notable increase from one incident in 2016 to fifty-three in 2019.[100] In September 2018 at least eight members of the Burkina Faso security forces were killed when a roadside bomb hit their patrol vehicle while they were travelling on the road linking Djibo and Baraboulé, in the north of the country near the border with Mali.[101] Interviews conducted with local government actors as well as transportation companies show that people have reduced their movement because they are afraid to be targeted by militants. This has resulted in a reduction of the number of people attending markets in Djibo and Petegoli, which is negatively impacting the livelihood of communities who, for decades, have travelled on these roads to go and exchange, buy and/or sell cattle and farming products. Additionally, the curfew established in October 2019 was extended following the attack against a military outpost in Arbinda. The curfew affects the provinces of Soum, Seno, and Oudalan in the Sahel.[102] The measure reduces the movements of populations, affecting their economic and trade activities.

Niamey–Gao via Ansongo

The Niamey–Ansongo–Gao route used to be a common transit axis for passengers and goods between Mali and Niger (in both directions) until 2018. Yet at the time of writing, due to the more complicated modalities of transport through the highly volatile Ménaka region – of local movements and other destinations alike - migratory movement through the region has dropped.[103] Another contributing factor is the overall decrease of long-range migrants directed to North Africa and Europe.

The route faces constant IED threats as militants continue to target Malian forces, the United Nations Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and French forces.[104] On 1 November 2019 a Malian military base suffered a deadly attack by ISWAP at In-Delimane in the Ménaka area.[105] On 4 December 2019 militants attacked the village of Labbezanga and assassinated the imam, and burned a vehicle belonging to the leader of a local youth organization.[106] As a consequence, the Malian army and security forces have announced the transfer of their border posts (Labbezanga and Andéramboukane) to Ansongo and Ménaka respectively.[107] This withdrawal leaves a conspicuous part of the border without any border-control posts. It means that the Labbezanga border post, which was re-established after the multidimensional crisis of 2012, became once again too dangerous and unsustainable for the Malian army and security forces.

Despite the growing insecurity, circular cross-border mobility does continue. Respondents such as farmers and herders in Mali and Niger said they were reducing the distance travelled on some roads or not travelling at all for fear of being targeted or injured in crossfire.[108] The enhanced controls on the routes (at least before the transfer of the Labbezanga border post) also complicated the conditions of travel. These factors have

Map 5: Main transit routes through the Tillabéri region, Niger

repercussions both for local traders and also for smugglers and their modus operandi. Traders are reportedly reluctant to cross the borders to reach markets because they are excessively taxed by security officers, armed bandits, and in some cases militants. In this situation, border control and security forces in general can be seen more as a source of abuse than of protection (as it will be discussed in more detail in the section headed 'Vulnerability of migrants in Liptako-Gourma').

Border security in this part of the Tillabéri region is increasingly under pressure due to widespread insecurity, a growing number of attacks and a prolonged state of emergency. The inability of the Nigerien security forces to address the menace coming from the border areas with Mali continues to grow. Insecurity has in fact forced Nigerien police and gendarmerie to withdraw inland, abandoning the advanced border posts in Yassane, Petelkoli and Makalondi, and leaving border protection entirely to military actors (who do not have a mandate to control migration).[109]

Travellers traversing the Tillabéri region to the Malian border are confronted by the fact that the alarming presence and activities of extremist groups has been met with an intensification of military operations in the regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua, including French-led Operation Barkhane and the enforcement of a state of emergency in several localities. Security measures require thorough controls on all vehicles and buses in transit on major roads, but reportedly the lack of personnel and their distribution cannot impede the proliferation of clandestine border crossings and smuggling activities that rely on more flexible infrastructure, including minor roads and motorbikes.[110] On 10 December 2019 the ongoing state of emergency was extended for a period of three months in ten departments of Tillabéri and Tahoua regions (Ouallam, Ayorou, Bankilare, Abala, Banibangou, Say, Torodi, Téra, Tassara, and Tillia).[111] More recently, authorities have adopted new security measures such as the prohibition of motorcycles at all times, petrol rationing to a maximum of 20 liters per person per day, and the closure of several markets suspected to be used as sources for food and petrol supply by jihadist militants.[112]

Although aimed at protecting civilians, these security restrictions have had some adverse effects on the lives of the local population, including forcing them to leave their homes. They have also limited – in some cases prevented - the movement of farmers who can no longer cultivate their fields, depriving them of their livelihood and increasing the risk of food insecurity. Criminal activities and banditry against travelling populations and traders have seen a notable increase in recent years. This is largely due to the lack of an effective security force presence. In the current situation, the fight against militant groups is a priority for the security forces, leaving local populations exposed to criminality and banditry. The same applies to (the limited number of) migrants passing through this part of the Tillabéri region, who are unlikely to receive protection from security forces whose priority has been to fight VEOs.

Gao–Tahoua–Agadez via Ménaka and Andéramboukane

Another option to reach Niger from northern Mali is to follow the Gao–Tahoua–Agadez axis that passes through Ménaka and Andéramboukane (Mali). The majority of flows observed at the Tahoua FMP are internal to Niger and to the region. According to DTM data in 2019, 3 000 migrants travelled via Tahoua per month, most of whom were Nigeriens travelling within Niger. In the second half of 2019 the percentage varies between 73% and 90%, followed by other countries such as Libya, Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire. The majority of migrants travelled because of seasonal migration (between 40 and 45% of migrants), short-term local movements (between 36% and 40%) and long-haul economic migration for a duration of more than six months (between 16% and 22%).[113] The main nationalities observed through the Tahoua FMP were Nigeriens (between 83% and 86%), Ivorians, Cameroonians, Beninese, Burkinabese and Nigerians (between 1% and 3%).[114]

Ménaka is a transit point that does not see significant numbers of long-distance migrants (around twenty individuals a day, according to DTM), but it can still be a point of passage for those who intend to travel to Algeria. Half of the flows recorded in Ménaka are heading to another destination in Mali, and half are directed to Algeria, according to the data published by DTM. It is almost exclusively men who travel on this route. The percentage of women varies between 0 and 2%. Those who travel through Ménaka are reportedly predominantly Malians, Nigeriens and other West Africans, for example Nigerians and Burkinabe. According to the data collected in Ménaka for this research, migrants departing to Algeria from Ménaka use Algerian traders who bring goods[115] to Ménaka and nearby towns.[116] This is a common practice for drivers to use their empty trucks to transport passengers, including migrants, to Kidal and Algeria.

Transportation vehicles in Andéramboukane, Mali

CONCLUSION

The most serious implication of the current conflict in Liptako-Gourma has been its effect on the mobility of local populations. The mass displacement of local populations that are in need of basic services, protection and humanitarian assistance is the most pressing issue right now. The phenomenon is growing quickly, with ever-increasing numbers of displaced, in particular in Burkina Faso. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that the conflict (as well as responses such as reinforced border security) is restricting the ability of local populations to move across the borders and reach local and regional markets, neighbouring towns and localities for trade and commerce (short-term/seasonal migratory movements linked to small economic activities). This impacts the livelihoods and resilience of the populations that are highly dependent on mobility – and as such runs the risk of having a much longer-term negative effect on the development situation in the region.

There does not seem to be a persistent correlation – be it positive or negative - between insecurity and northbound migration flows in the Liptako-Gourma region. While the roads used by migrants have grown more dangerous because of the proliferation of IEDs, VEOs and intercommunal conflict, the trajectories and flows have not changed commensurate to the changing security context, except in such areas where overall mobility is hindered due to increasing border controls or other checkpoints. The decision to undertake the migration journey, in particular the long-haul one to Europe (which is still a relatively small percentage of the total number of migratory movements), is more based on material and practical considerations than on the security situation on the ground. The factors that could potentially alter one's determination to migrate mostly refer to actual material obstacles, including enhanced border controls and lack of funds, far more than to perceptions about the possible risks of death or sanctions as a result of anti-migration legislation. This suggests that the decision to start a migratory route relies more on the actual possibility of travel rather than on the security situation on the route.

Algerian smuggled fuel in Ménaka, Mali

3. VULNERABILITY OF MIGRANTS TO ABUSE FROM STATE AND NON-STATE (ARMED) ACTORS

This section looks at protection incidents that people on the move may encounter – both in terms of what they entail and who the main perpetrators are – with specific focus on vulnerabilities linked to human smuggling, and the involvement of non-state armed actors and security forces in this, as well as on vulnerabilities linked to intercommunal processes.

PROTECTION INCIDENTS AND PERPETRATORS – AN OVERVIEW

When assessing protection incidents it is important to distinguish between male and female migrants. According to available data sources, the ratio of men and women travelling in the region is between 80% and 20% or 70% and 30%.[117] Disaggregated data presented in the 4Mi Snapshot on protection incidents for people on the move in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso shows that, with the exception of detention, female migrants are more vulnerable to protection incidents on the route.

Table 3: Common protection incidents against migrants in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso per gender

Most common protection incidents, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso	Male migrants	Female migrants
Corruption/bribes	>50%	>55%
Physical abuse	>15%	>20%
Robbery	>10%	>15%
Detention	>10%	>5%
Sexual assault	5%	>15%

Note: Disaggregated data from the 4Mi Snapshot on Protection incidents

Data from a Mixed Migration Centre study similarly demonstrate that women are more vulnerable to serious abuses, with between one in four and one in five among surveyed women reporting to have suffered (or witnessed) physical violence, robberies, sexual assaults and harassment.[118] This information indicates that there is a need for a gender-specific approach for protection programmes. According to the 4Mi Snapshot, the capital cities and other urban hubs are most often cited as areas where protection incidents take place. However, interviewed migrants and refugees also refer to border areas as the sites of incidents.[119]

Despite the volatile security situation, the most frequent security incident reported by migrants is extortion. This is confirmed by the 4Mi data, which shows that among 999 protection incidents reported by 805 respondents, two-thirds are cases of extortion.[120] While this is true for the regional data, it can also be confirmed on a country-specific level. In Burkina Faso robberies and extortions are the most frequent abuses suffered by migrants.[121] According to another dataset, more respondents from Burkina Faso (42%) and Mali (27%) than those of other nationalities mentioned robberies.[122] Out of 657 reported cases of extortion, 35% were reported to have taken place in Mali, 31% in Niger and 29% in Burkina Faso. Unlike other types of incidents, extortion affects men and women indiscriminately (50% in each case).[123] Other reported protection incidents include robbery (10% of total reported incidents) and physical abuse or harassment (10%). In both cases, approximately one in ten respondents experienced these incidents at least once (12% in the case of robbery and 9% for physical abuses). The gender imbalance of these incidents is again apparent: 25% of women and 5% of men reported physical abuse; 23% of women and 9% of men reported being robbed.[124]

Besides the type of abuse, it is also important to look closely into who reportedly were the perpetrators. There is a general lack of detailed and disaggregated statistical data on protection incidents. According to the accessible data, in Niger in 2017–18 smugglers had carried out almost half (45%) of all the reported 424 incidents of abuse. This correlates with the fact that 60% of the interviewed migrants felt they were misled by smugglers (about the conditions of travel, costs, routes and safety). In contrast, another study from 2019 using a different dataset from finds that smugglers are responsible for protection incidents in only about 5% of cases.[125] A consistent finding throughout both studies however is the role of security forces as perpetrators of protection incidents reported by migrants and refugees. Incidents of physical abuse are attributed to security forces, in more than 50% of incidents. It is important to note that oftentimes the perpetrators are reported by surveyed migrants and refugees as unknown individuals or groups.

HUMAN SMUGGLING

The above makes clear that protection incidents targeting migrants are in part linked to processes of human smuggling. Hence, in order to start thinking about serving the protection needs of migrants, we'll explore the role of human smuggling in migration in the Liptako-Gourma region in more detail.

Overall, it is important to note that the use of smugglers in West Africa is limited, as many localities are reachable through ordinary means of transport such as buses. Interviewed respondents report that migrants do not need smugglers until they reach Gao in Mali, and Agadez in Niger.[126] Our findings are in line with 4Mi data on Liptako-Gourma, as approximately two-thirds of respondents (64%) said they did not use smugglers.[127] This finding is not unexpected: nationals of ECOWAS enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom of movement, and travelling through the major route axes does not necessarily require a facilitator. This role becomes essential to mobility in the areas such as the Sahara Desert where no other organized transport can be found.

However, when looking at it in more detail, we find that the extent to which migrants use smugglers differs across the Liptako-Gourma countries. In Burkina Faso, as in other countries of the region, the main means of transport are official buses and private vehicles. Smugglers do not appear to be the main facilitators of migration within Burkina Faso.[128] In the case of northbound long-haul mobility this can be explained by the transitory nature of the country: the bulk of migrants cross Burkina Faso on their way from their countries of origin to the north. It is a common opinion among interviewed actors (border communities, security forces and transporters) that because of the clampdown on migrant smuggling in the Agadez region of Niger, a significant impact on the migratory flows towards the north has been produced. 'On the buses from Ouagadougou to Niamey, today one finds only a tiny portion of the West African migrants who used to pack the transport lines connecting Burkina Faso to Niger during the peak of the migration "crisis" in 2015 and 2016.'[129]

In Mali, almost half of the migrants surveyed by 4Mi said their journey to the location of their interview had not been facilitated by anyone (47%).[130] The remaining migrants interviewed reported that their travels had been facilitated by a smuggler (36%) and/or by a friend or relative (26%).[131] Accommodation, transport to holding places and collecting clients from meeting points were the main smuggling services cited by respondents of the study.[132] Smugglers interviewed for the same study also cited the provision of accommodation as their main services (86%), followed by transportation to a holding place (71%), recruiting clients to migrate (52%) and safe transit across a border (40%).[133] When looking at human rights violations and protection incidents, one key finding is that the majority of migrants who used smugglers to organize their journeys were not misled by them and were satisfied with their services (69%).[134]

Most use of smugglers occurs in northern Mali, where migrants are unaware of or unfamiliar with hazards on the ground. The city of Gao, with its complicated security situation and general lack of information on geography of the desert, scares migrants, and the relationship with smugglers gives them a sense of security.[135] Navigating hazardous terrain, including areas controlled by armed groups, as well as passing through checkpoints unhindered, require having reliable connections with all actors present along the routes as well as a strong understanding of the socio-political dynamics in the area. Besides that, the hostile desert environment requires assistance from drivers who are familiar with routes, water points and checkpoints on the way.

Smuggling of humans and goods constitutes a significant share of Gao's economy.[136] For this reason, smugglers can boast remarkable social legitimacy,[137] and the protection of powerful actors at both local and national level. The profits made from illicit activities buy political influence, to the extent that participants in criminal activities may have multiple (sometimes reinforcing) identities within state institutions and criminal networks.[138] This can be illustrated by the arrest of some migrant smugglers in Gao in early 2018.[139] The short-lived arrest and quick release of a well-known human trafficker demonstrates possible existing alliances with powerful state and non-state actors ensuring the protection of their activities.[140] The industry was affected as the transportation of migrants from Gao to Algeria became difficult to organize.[141] At the same time, the repression of migrant smuggling in Gao proved symbolic rather than effective, with only a few arrests of smugglers, who were soon released without conviction. However, this was apparently enough to prompt

a swift reorganization of migrant smuggling in the north of Mali. It led to greater criminal organization by the smugglers, collusions with law-enforcement officers, increased vulnerability for migrants and difficulties in access for humanitarian actors.[142] Greater attention to human smuggling in Gao redirected some of the flows to Timbuktu because of poor law enforcement which enables smuggling activities to be organized with less pressure. This confirms the more general observation that migration flows tend to concentrate on routes where there is little or no presence of law-enforcement actors.[143]

> **Box 6: Procurement of Malian documents**
>
> Another lucrative side of migration and migrant smuggling in Mali has been the procurement of authentic Malian documents for non-Malian nationals travelling to Algeria. Mali and Algeria have a visa-free travel agreement allowing Malian nationals to cross to Algeria without the need to apply for a visa. As a result, non-Malian nationals from West Africa were seeking Malian documentation to cross the border unhindered.[144] However, this has become more complicated since Mali has adopted new biometric ID cards that limit the possibility to produce fake documents.[145]

In Niger, instead, human-smuggling activities have been largely affected by the implementation of the anti-smuggling law 2015/36.[146] Major changes in migration governance occurred as a result of the adoption of the law. Unlike other ECOWAS countries, Niger brought migration-related issues under the management of the Ministry of Interior. This framed migration as a security-related rather than a development-related issue, as it is in other ECOWAS countries, where it is mostly managed by Ministries of Economy, Territorial Administration etc.[147] This can also be described as the creation of Niger as a 'transit' state, framed as shifting the location of border security, the blurring of migration into other transnational threats, and the creation of new domestic institutional practices.[148] Besides being in conflict with regional free-movement policies, such policies also create concrete repercussions for migrants. Smugglers have started to avoid checkpoints, shifting routes in order to avoid detection, which causes more deaths in the desert and increased risks of abuse. It has been observed that the law 2015/36 caused serious repercussions for the whole region, not only on Niger, causing reduction of flows and shifts in the modus operandi of the migration industry in Niger. Taking the migration economy underground exacerbated ransoming, increased prices and extortion as the smuggling business became more challenging.[149]

Most smugglers interviewed by 4Mi in Niger reported that accommodation was the main service they provided (80%), followed by transportation to a holding place (52%), recruiting clients to migrate (74%) and safe transit across a border (46%). Refugees and migrants also reported that the main smuggler service they used was provision of accommodation (89%). Other services cited by migrants were collecting clients from a meeting point (72%), safe transit across a border (76%) and recruiting clients to migrate (61%).[150] The smuggling networks operating in Niger in 2017–18 seemed to be more extensive than those operating in Mali.[151]

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-STATE ARMED ACTORS

Different non-state armed actors (armed groups, VEOs, armed bandits) benefit and somehow participate in trafficking activities in Liptako-Gourma, such as the trafficking of arms, drugs, motorbikes, fuel, cattle rustling and poaching. Some of these activities serve as income generation, while others are used to provide the goods necessary for the functioning of these groups themselves. Migrant trafficking and smuggling are not common activities for these groups to engage in, as they are not the most lucrative illicit activities in the region.[152]

With regard to armed jihadist groups in particular, there is still no evidence that armed jihadist groups are involved in migrant smuggling and/or profiting from the underground economy of migration and smuggling. Unlike kidnapping and ransoms, human trafficking and migrant smuggling are rarely the main source of revenue for VEOs. However, while VEOs may not earn money from human trafficking, they tolerate it and benefit from it in other ways.[153] At the local level, for example, elements of jihadist groups may make some financial gains through robberies and bribes at checkpoints. Nevertheless, all respondents interviewed for this study agreed that it is highly unlikely for migrants to be recruited as armed fighters. It appears that local populations are more at risk of radicalization than those who travel. As demonstrated in the previous sections, the overall insecurity in Liptako-Gourma has much more of an impact on those living in this area than those transiting through it.

The situation is a bit different when it comes to armed groups – such as those that control the region of Gao and Kidal. Given that they are the de facto security actors in these regions, they keep a close watch on all licit and illicit business activities conducted on their territory. In March 2019 there were ten checkpoints reported between Gao and In-Khalil with only the Gao exit checkpoint controlled by Malian security forces. The others were controlled almost exclusively by armed groups that were signatories to the Peace Agreement, with the exception of that of Tin Aoukar, which is controlled by MSA.[154] Smugglers rely on their good personal and/or business connections with other members of smugglers' networks, as well as with armed groups and their affiliates, for access to smuggling routes. According to interviews with 4Mi monitors, 'the most common type of relationship between armed groups and migrant convoys is a *droit de passage* granted to smugglers'.[155] 'We are asked to pay between 2 000 and 3 000 FCFA at each checkpoint until we reach the border with Algeria,' said a migrant.[156] With such a set-up, migrants cannot transit between Gao and In-Khalil, and the Algerian border, without interacting with armed groups and paying at each checkpoint. While returning migrants interviewed in Gao did not report abuses committed by armed groups, it was previously found that the top hierarchies of both groups are not always capable of preventing their men from ransoming or robbing migrants at checkpoints despite instructions to not harm migrants. Nonetheless, serious abuses such as ransoming, torture and detention/kidnapping have also been reported in these regions.[157] Overall, however, the facilitation of migration is not a key source of revenue for armed groups in northern Mali.

As a possible solution, migrants seek alternative routes where patrols and security forces are non-existent in order to travel unhindered.[158] This exposes them to a higher risk of being robbed and abused by armed bandits, armed militants, and in some cases members of the security forces.[159] As a result, migrants in transit are facing increased threats and risks, such as being robbed of their money and belongings by armed bandits and security forces.[160] Migrants also reported that bandits tend to display more violence and aggressive behaviours than armed groups at checkpoints (which will be discussed in more detail below).[161] 'They insult us and even rip off our clothes when we refuse to pay them,' said one respondent.[162]

INVOLVEMENT OF SECURITY FORCES

The complexity of the situation is exacerbated by the widespread perception of the role of security forces as those who aim to undermine migration, including by blocking or preventing migrants from continuing (mentioned by 34% of the respondents), committing human rights violations (21%) or fostering discrimination (13%).[163] 4Mi respondents tended to see law-enforcement agents as inhibitors of mobility (the most frequent answer with 34%) rather than as providers of security and protection (2% of respondents). Security forces reportedly inspired much more fear (89% of respondents) than trust (75% of respondents affirmed that they do not trust security officers).[164] The increasing securitization of migration, and its perverse effects through such behavior by security forces has in other contexts been shown to increase the duration of the journey and in turn migrant vulnerability.[165] However, most migrants travelling through Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso does so for a relatively short period of time (30 days or less) up until the northern regions of Niger and Mali.[166]

In Mali, with regard to migration specifically, there seems to be collusion between some law-enforcement officials, smugglers and drivers transporting migrants from/through Mali. 'It is an unfortunate reality but some law enforcement officers don't inspect certain vehicles because the drivers agreed to offer them money,' said a gendarme interviewed in Ménaka.[167] In a way, the deterioration of the security situation actually reinforces this behaviour. The implementation of checkpoints along major axes in Mali, such as that connecting Bamako to Gao, has increased the opportunities for rent-seeking behaviour. Routes linking southern and central Mali to Gao from the national highway, for example, require migrants to pass through a checkpoint at Wabaria in Gao, where migrants (including those who are from ECOWAS states) are reported to pay CFA 10 000 CFA (€15) in order to continue their journeys.[168]

In Burkina Faso, national immigration regulations require a valid ID to enter the country. If the document is lacking, the person should be denied entry. Yet a 2019 study by the Mixed Migration Centre finds that this occurs only very rarely.[169] According to various sources interviewed, some local security forces turn a blind eye to the migrants' lack of documentation in exchange for compensation.[170] Furthermore, 'law enforcement officers in Seytenga were reportedly aware that a local group of small-scale *passeurs* embedded in border communities helped undocumented migrants to evade border controls, but there is no indication that

the officers took active measures to disrupt this activity'.[171] This may also be linked to the limited capacities of the security forces in Burkina Faso to deal with undocumented migration, especially in the present circumstances, where security threats are a major preoccupation. Undocumented migrants also reported during the interviews that certain police officers at checkpoints request higher fees from migrants who do not possess civil identification. 'We are also questioned about our itinerary, the purpose of our travels. Sometimes, ID documents are kept for further inspection,' explained a migrant interviewed in Sebba, Yagha province.[172] The creation of checkpoints and patrols on different axes travelled by migrants are among the measures taken by the government to limit the movement of undocumented migrants and migrant smuggling.[173] This type of control also allows for the informal taxation of migrants, i.e. the extortion of bribes. As is the case in other countries in the region, state security actors structurally engage in the extortion of bribes from migrants. According to the data collected by Mixed Migration Centre, gendarmes (20% of reported cases of extortion) and customs officers in particular were accused by migrants who reported being affected by corruption in Burkina Faso.[174] Furthermore, it has been found that although extortion seems a lesser evil in comparison to other protection incidents (physical or sexual abuse), it can relate to or help to enable further (human rights) violations.[175]

In Niger, actions taken against the movement of undocumented migrants, including joint efforts between state and local authorities, are not standardized and differ from one locality to another. The major initiative was introduced in 2015 by the anti-smuggling law covering the region of Agadez in the northern Niger. It remains unclear whether this law is being implemented in other regions of the country. During the interviews for this research a member of the local and traditional authorities in the rural town of Torodi (Say department of Tillabéri region) explained that there is no cooperation between the state and local actors to tackle the movement of undocumented migrants in his town and that undocumented migrants from Guinea and Gambia continue to transit through Torodi after entering from Burkina Faso.[176] As key governance providers, traditional local authorities were asked if they are playing a role providing protection to migrants passing through the transit town Torodi. Based on responses, local authorities appear to play a minimal role in the protection of returning and transiting migrants.[177]

More importantly, migrants interviewed in Niger reported widespread abuses by members of law enforcement.[178] They reported experiencing racketeering at checkpoints and in towns when they are stopped by police officers. In some cases, migrants were beaten up when they didn't have or refused to give money to police officers. This can be confirmed by the existing data reported in the study on smugglers in Mali and Niger. Security forces were accused of 46% of cases of physical abuse, 6% of cases of sexual abuse and only 3% of robberies.[179] Several respondents interviewed in the region of Tillabéri, including local actors, confirmed stories of police and military corruption and abuse against migrants. One migrant interviewed in Dougourou, who attempted to cross the border, shared his story: 'They emptied the tank from its fuel and crammed us in a fuel tank. There were authority members. We were then transported to the border.' He went on: 'The smugglers requested money from us and promised us that crossing the border would be easy but instead of taking 3 000 FCFA, they asked for 5 000 or 7 000 FCFA to cross safely. Separately, police officers ask also for more money. If you refuse, they can beat you up.'[180]

Aware of the risk of being arrested and abused, in particular by members of law enforcement, migrants attempting to reach north-eastern Niger via Tillabéri have resorted to various strategies for avoiding detection by police officers and the local population. One government actor interviewed in Torodi[181] indicated that migrants passing through his town to Agadez travel on the paved road, also known as National Road 1. 'They are transported on motorbike-taxis until Niamey, this way it is easier to go off road and avoid police checkpoints,' he said. On the one hand, this means that the flow of migrants is limited. On the other, it also means that just a few migrants relied on this solution and tried to avoid the border and official buses.[182] Finally, this information dates back to the pre-state of emergency period when round trips on motorbikes were not yet banned. At the present moment, all such travel in the border areas of Tillabéri region is banned. As previously stated, the security situation mostly affects local populations, but in this case people on the move are also disadvantaged. In fact, according to our respondents, since the reinforcement of security controls, migrants travelling inside vehicles would get off close to the checkpoint and walk around to avoid being stopped by police officers. In addition, several respondents indicated that foreign travellers passing through their towns are being reported to the police to have their identity verified. 'If they have their ID documents, they are free to go. If they don't, police officers try to take a lot of money from them. It's a rip-off,' admitted a rural agent interviewed in Torodi.[183]

During interviews conducted with local authorities in the regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua, it was reported that some migrants travelling without identity documents have tried to obtain forged documentation from local administrations while in transit. Smugglers facilitate this service and approach local authorities themselves. 'Our own citizens are helping migrants in transit to get civil documentation. It is not easy though because we have registries and before delivering a birth certificate we need to trace back their family's origins,' said a tax collector interviewed in the town of Téra.[184] A civil servant in Diagourou explained that he refuses to deliver civil documentation until applicants come in person to his office so he can verify their identity.[185] This need for fake IDs can be interpreted as a negative consequence of the anti-smuggling law adopted in Niger. As there is a limitation on the transportation of non-Nigerien migrants north of Agadez, a logical decision for those trying to cross the territory of Niger is to obtain Nigerien IDs.

The above implies that a securitized approach to security and border control in the region has made migrants much more vulnerable to abuse at the hands of state security forces.

XENOPHOBIA

A final point to note here is that the volatile security situation in Liptako-Gourma creates xenophobic feelings, fears and suspicion towards those who are not local who come to the villages and towns. Fieldwork in the three countries has shown that suspicion and fear are common feelings among both local communities and local authorities in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. In Mali there is a fear of unknown individuals who could be migrants but who could also be used by jihadist groups to infiltrate communities. Local populations living in

constant fear and who lack protection from the security services are afraid of everyone entering their villages. 'Migration can become dangerous for our communities because ill-intentioned individuals could enter and move throughout the country,' said a local actor interviewed in Labbezanga.[186] Besides, it is worth noting that local authorities have expressed concern over some migrants smuggling drugs. 'We also observe a significant number of migrants from Cameroon and Nigeria who are smuggling drugs,' said a gendarme interviewed in Labbezanga.[187] One local authority representative interviewed in Labbezanga, in the Gao region, pointed out to drugs smuggled into the country, such as the narcotic-like pain reliever Tramadol, worrying that this could become a major security and health issue in the region.[188]

As in Mali, in Burkina Faso, given the current climate of insecurity, mistrust exists between local communities and migrants. 'Migrants can be singled out by local communities. It becomes hard for them to integrate,' said an NGO worker interviewed in Djibo, Sahel region.[189] Besides concerns over security, host populations are preoccupied with the lack of basic services and goods such as water and housing to be shared with newcomers. This led one local authority figure to suggest that 'it would be better to limit this mobility for national security purposes, to eliminate banditry, better manage our own resources, and restore durable peace in the region.'[190]

In Niger, in response to the deterioration of the security situation and the incapacity of the authorities to protect civilians, local authorities have established surveillance committees in charge of alerting law enforcement as soon as they identify possible threats. Local authorities insist that these are not self-defence groups and that they are not armed.[191] Despite an increase in Niger's military budget by 20% of the national budget and operations led by the Barkhane Force, several areas remain without a military presence, increasing fear of attacks among the local populations. 'Nowadays you can travel across thousands of kilometres and not see a single soldier. On market days we used to see military officers, now they are all gone. People who used to go to the market are now too afraid because bandits and militants can go there,' said a civil servant interviewed in Diagourou.[192]

As a consequence, suspicion among local actors and populations has increased. Foreign travellers passing through the region are immediately reported to police officers.[193] This is meant to detect possible intrusions by armed militants. However, many migrants travel without official identification, which in the current climate of fear exposes them to more scrutiny. With the expansion of non-state armed groups, respondents explained that when migrants are stopped without formal ID documents and thus cannot prove their identity, they become suspects and can face intimidation, threats and physical abuse.[194] Overall, the distrust of migrants identified in the three countries is not an idiosyncratic finding. Instead, it is in line with a global trend of anger and mistrust towards refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, which has a proven harmful impact on their biopsychosocial well-being and may lead them to avoid social and health services even when needed.[195]

State neglect and hybrid governance

While not a direct access issue, state capacity does play into the dynamics of aid in the Liptako-Gourma region. To varying extents across the respective three border countries, there is minimal central state presence. Mali has a high degree of decentralization embedded in the state governance structure - comprising of municipalities, circles or districts, and regions. Local authorities in regions, municipalities and districts are in charge of coordinating, overseeing and implementing services and policies at the local level from education, primary healthcare, sanitation, waste management, water distribution and provision, among many others.

Due to state's absence and limited resources of the humanitarian organizations' acute shortages and infrastructure gaps can be attested, in some cases rendering key services such as refugee camps unsustainable. The Mentao camp in Burkina Faso which since 2012 has hosted many refugees from Mali, was attacked by a group of unidentified men, on the night of September 22 to 23, 2017. Schools and health posts in the camp have been subsequently closed and basic services no longer provided. As local populations in and around Djibo are fleeing to other areas, refugees in Mentao camp have also expressed the intention to be relocated elsewhere. A lack of state security provisions can also curtail or push back humanitarian activities. The Goudoubo Refugee Camp near Dori was attacked twice by unidentified armed individuals in November and December 2019, and vehicles belonging to aid actors were attacked on their way back from the camp towards Dori on 22 December.

In some cases, local communities are obliged to turn to traditional authorities and non-state armed actors for basic governance provision and security. This has been especially true in Mali since the insurrection led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Din in northern Mali in 2012. Since then, the central state has been severely destabilized, forced to pull back from northern regions, and from parts of central regions more recently, ceding ground to rebel governance. In other cases still, customary law administered by traditional chiefs and the religious norms governed by imams, religious scholars, and qadis have played key roles in the administration of justice and the maintenance of social cohesion. This latter phenomenon offers a more optimistic outlook for humanitarian access. For example, in the Ménaka region, traditional and interim authorities have provided assistance to NGOs in the fields of security, justice, and human rights. In Niger, respondents in Tillabéri region indicated that the traditional chiefs were best fitted to resolve conflicts amid increasing tensions around natural resources between farmers and herders.

However, even though traditional authorities can mediate and solve disputes between and within communities and individuals, they are usually not equipped to deal with major violations. As a consequence of the state absence in the Ménaka region, there is also a lack of judges operating there. Therefore, the only institution who documented cases of serious human rights violations is MINUSMA whose officials are restricted to operate within the town and its immediate surroundings. As a result, many violations remain unreported and undocumented. Moreover, traditional authorities themselves are not immune to the increased violence and instability they operate within. In light of increased attacks and incursions of villages by armed groups,

compounded by the absence of military troops or police to protect civilians, several traditional chiefs have also fled and not returned, hence creating a vacuum of traditional authority. In November 2019, at least five traditional village chiefs were killed by suspected jihadist militants in the Tillabéri region. One respondent in Tillabéri explained 'jihadists target populations so they don't cooperate with state authorities. The first targeted are village chiefs who are killed or kidnapped by militants. Most especially, if they suspect that these chiefs were working with state authorities.'

CONCLUSION

People on the move in Liptako-Gourma are subject to multiple protection incidents while travelling, the most common one being extortion – which affects different forms of mobility and not exclusively long-haul migrants. Also, extortion more or less affects men and women in the same manner. Other protection incidents are related to abuse, robbery and detention. Here, women are overall more vulnerable to (especially sexual abuse, physical abuse and robbery).

Conflict has not had big effect on the way in which migration is organized: means of transportation are still available for local and regional travel. Instead, the biggest shifts that we see are the result of increased security controls due to the counter-terrorist agenda and the implementation of border security and anti-smuggling measures. Such measures include increased controls along the routes, at the checkpoints and at the borders. Security forces use these measures for the extortion of bribes from migrants, which results in fear of security forces, which in turn may force people on the move to deviate from major routes and avoid controls, to rely more on smugglers and become even more vulnerable. Besides that, such security measures as the state of emergency that limits travel via motorbikes have a serious impact on livelihoods and resilience of the local communities.

In addition, we have found no significant links between armed groups and migrants, neither involvement by armed groups in the recruitment of migrants nor profiting significantly from the migration business. While the length of journeys throughout the region remains short, it will be important to track the impact of the securitization of migration as it might lead to longer duration on routes which have shown to be a contributing factor of migrant vulnerability.

4. ACCESSING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN LIPTAKO-GOURMA

ACCESS TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN LIPTAKO-GOURMA – AN OVERVIEW

Access to vulnerable populations is a major challenge throughout the Liptako-Gourma region, and the situation is quickly deteriorating given the rise of intercommunal violence, attacks by VEOs and the increase in military operations. Access to the region is particularly challenging in several localities, and most often heightened at border regions between the relevant states. For example, in the regions of Gao and Ménaka the most difficult areas to access are along the border with Niger, where military operations and armed clashes are taking place. In the Nigerien regions bordering Mali and Burkina Faso interviewees reported heightened incidents of physical attacks, kidnappings, robberies and the looting of villages and small businesses. The adjacent regions of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have suffered difficult or non-existent access to basic services and documentation in comparison to the wider populace. This situation has largely aggravated since the deterioration of the security situation in these areas and the presence of VEOs.

The aforementioned security factors have rendered access difficult, if not impossible, for aid organizations seeking to reach people in dire need of assistance. In the local context of increased violence and hyper-militarization, humanitarian organizations have regularly denounced the reduction of humanitarian space in the Liptako-Gourma region, while also citing growing infringements upon their operating principles of independence and neutrality. Some have suspended their work altogether. For example, in December 2019 seven INGOs based in Ménaka suspended their work indefinitely owing to the high rate of criminality and insecurity. Previously, other aid organizations in the region suspended their operations because of armed robberies, car hijacking and physical attacks.

Existing impediments preventing populations from accessing humanitarian aid and basic social services are likely to persist in 2020.[196] Furthermore, in places where humanitarian actors have no access, it has become nearly impossible to monitor incidents of protection and offer assistance to affected populations, including migrants. Although numerous protection incidents are documented in Liptako-Gourma, the reality is that, due to the insecure situation in the region, many more incidents are probably never reported, as several areas remain inaccessible.

Box 7: An overview of aid organizations active in Liptako-Gourma

In November 2019 112 aid organizations were providing assistance across Mali. The Timbuktu region counted the highest number of aid organizations with fifty-one humanitarian actors, followed by Mopti (fifty aid organizations) and the region of Gao, with a total of forty-four aid actors.[197] Unlike Burkina Faso and Niger, national NGOs make up the majority of humanitarian responders in Mali, with forty-nine national actors followed by INGOs (forty-eight) and UN agencies (eight). However, due to the insecurity some aid organizations have pulled out or suspended their operations.

The bulk of the people in need in Mali live in the regions of Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Segou. The rest are located in regions of Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso, Kidal and in the district of Bamako.[198] Healthcare, food security, education and nutrition are the sectors most dealt with by aid organizations. However, despite the increase in internal displacements, only three organizations (UNHCR, NRC and ACTED) are covering needs in shelters in northern and central Mali. With regards to migrants specifically, it should be noted that humanitarian organizations have little presence north of Gao to enable them offer any protection to migrants in transit. Most provide support and protection for migrants returning from Algeria, but protection of migrants transiting through Gao and In-Khalil to reach Algeria seems limited.

In Burkina Faso, access to populations in need has been increasingly difficult, and even impossible in some areas. While there is not an exact number of people in inaccessible areas, the Norwegian Refugee Council estimated that 'tens of thousands' of people cannot be reached by aid workers in the country. As of January 2020, forty-eight humanitarian actors were providing assistance to people in need across the five most affected regions of Sahel, Centre-Nord, Nord, Est and Boucle du Mouhoun. The provinces of Soum (Sahel) and Sanmatenga (Centre-Nord), which are hosting a high number of IDPs, have the largest number of humanitarian actors. The vast majority of operating agencies are INGOs, and health assistance is currently the highest-priority need followed by food security, WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), and protection.[200]

In Niger, international and local aid organizations, including UN agencies, have been providing assistance to people in need in the regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua. As of 2019, 48 organizations – the majority of them INGOs – were operating in the region, with the majority located in the departments of Tillabéri and Ouallam. Departments bordering Mali had fewer aid actors present as a result of violence and security restrictions.[201] More than half of the organizations present (twenty-five) provide water, sanitation and hygiene assistance. Between fifteen and seventeen aid organizations focus on food security, protection and health.

MAIN OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

Violence

Increased instances of violent conflict provide the main impediment to access to vulnerable populations in the region. Since mid-2017 humanitarian access in central and northern areas of Mali has been hampered by attacks from armed groups, intercommunal tensions, roadside IEDs and rising criminality. Last year 180 acts of banditry targeting NGOs were recorded[202] alongside a total of 194 incidents related to IEDs. These security incidents killed 216 persons including 79 civilians, and 93% of victims were from Mopti. 2019 also witnessed a 45% increase in incidents of protection in comparison with the previous year.[203] Ménaka is statistically the most dangerous region for aid workers, with at least forty-two security incidents involving aid workers recorded in 2019, yet the regions of Mopti and Gao also proved volatile in the last year, with 41 and 39 security incidents reported, respectively.

In Burkina Faso, insurgent groups have widened their scope from initially targeting defence and security forces to carrying out attacks upon civilians and aid workers, especially in the area of Djibo. On 3 November 2019 the mayor of Djibo (Soum Province of the Sahel), who was also an MP, was ambushed and executed in front of several bystanders.[204] Another high-profile attack took place on 24 December resulting in the deaths of thirty-five civilians, almost all of them women. This was one of the deadliest assaults to take place in country since the start of the violence. Amid the intensification of VEO attacks, bandits have also exploited the security and state vacuum to intimidate, attack and threaten civilians, set up checkpoints and loot villages. Armed bandits are often suspected to be behind attacks against aid convoys and humanitarian staff.

In Niger, the current operating environment in Tillabéri is marred by the alarming security situation in high-risk areas and areas hosting IDPs. Aid operations in these areas have become increasingly difficult.[205] Last year, aid actors were repeatedly targeted and threatened by bandits and armed militants who stole several humanitarian vehicles. Based on interviews conducted and recent violent incidents recorded, the district of Ayorou is the most affected by jihadist insurgencies. For instance, the Ayorou district is inaccessible for aid workers, who reported being under constant intimidation by members of ISGS/ISWAP and/or JNIM. One of the humanitarian actors interviewed in Tillabéri reported that these groups have made living conditions unbearable for the local population who refuse to leave following an ultimatum given to them by ISGS/ISWAP.[206] Humanitarian actors interviewed also indicated that it has become increasingly difficult and precarious to identify actors controlling a given area in order to negotiate access where populations are in need of relief and protection.

It is worth noting that although humanitarian access has been severely impacted in the Tillaberi region, the level of access is still notably higher than in the border regions of Burkina Faso. Humanitarian actors active on both sides of the border indicate that in Niger it is still possible for certain activities to work through existing state structures that – although being heavily impacted by increased demand – are still operating and can ramp up activities relatively quickly given the necessary amount of funding and operational support. On

the Burkinabe side of the border respondents indicated that due to the total abandoning of state structures providing basic services – particularly hospitals and schools – such an approach is no longer possible forcing organisations to rely on intervention strategies that substitute state services.[207]

The proliferation of violence throughout the Liptako-Gourma region is having a profound impact upon the reach and capabilities of humanitarian organizations, effectively leaving entire communities isolated or inaccessible. In 2019 ACAPS[208] rated Mali as four out of five for access constraints ('very high access constraints'). 'In some areas, looting of humanitarian organizations is common, with an average of six incidents a month causing reduction or suspension of operations,' reads the analysis. In Burkina Faso, humanitarian access has drastically shrunk in the Centre-Nord, especially impacting communities hosting IDPs, such as the Dablom and Pensa areas in the Sanmatenga province.[209] A chronic lack of humanitarian access here not only leaves the local population sorely deprived of aid, but also increases their vulnerabilities and reinforces a growing sense of abandonment, as expressed by rural communities.

A further negative impact of violence upon humanitarian access is that the intensification of attacks carried out by VEOs has prompted the scaling up of military operations in response to the deteriorating security situation. This militarization not only exacerbates access issues from a logistical standpoint – with military operations cutting off entire swathes of land – but can also compromise the reputation and core operating principles of humanitarian organizations. For example, in 2020 the governor of Tillabéri ordained the use of military escorts for all humanitarian operations across all departments except Kollo. In the same month, one of the humanitarian vehicles was stolen and used in an attack against the prison of Koutakale.[210] Many aid organizations, mostly NGOs, refuse to travel to the field with a military escort, because this goes against basic humanitarian principles such as impartiality and neutrality. As a consequence, displaced persons and host communities in areas that require such an escort have no access to humanitarian assistance.

States of emergency

All three states have exercised emergency legislation in Liptako-Gourma amid rising violence and instability, and such measures prove a significant obstacle to accessing vulnerable populations. The Nigerien state of emergency and accompanying curfew have reduced the amount of time aid actors spend in areas of need, as they are required to drive back to the town of Tillabéri before dusk. This means that in addition to working under heightened pressure to carry out rapid distributions in high-risk areas, humanitarian staff have fewer opportunities to establish trust with communities in need as they are not permitted to spend the night in the field. Expressing the sense of distance created by such restrictions, whereby aid workers return to established offices each day, a herder who has been working with a local NGO in Abala observed, 'There is no humanitarian organization present in conflict areas. All the organizations are in Tillabéri.' He affirmed that 'it would be unwise to stay in the areas of Bankilare, Banibangou, Ayorou, Torodi, and other areas where insecurity persists.'[211] In Burkina Faso on 27 December 2019 the state of emergency was extended in fourteen provinces for a year.[212] Initially the state of emergency was declared on 1 January 2019 in the following areas of the national territory: Boucle du Mouhoun region: the provinces of Kossi and Sourou; the Central

East region: the province of Koulpélogo; the Eastern region: the provinces of Gnagna, Gourma, Komndjari, Kompienga and Tapoa; Hauts-Bassins region: the province of Kénédougou; the North region: the province of Lorum; the Sahel region: the provinces of Oudalan, Seno, Soum and Yagha.[213] In Mali, the state of emergency, in force almost without interruption since the Bamako attack in November 2015, was once again extended for a year from 31 October 2019. This decision, adopted by the Council of Ministers, is caused by continuous jihadist attacks and intercommunal violence in the centre of the country, over the past 12 months.[214]

Funding

An overall lack of funding is the final major obstacle to the provision of aid and the scope of humanitarian access. In Burkina Faso there was a reported six-month delay in humanitarian groups being able to dispense aid in 2019, largely due to a lack of funding.[215] As part of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) a total of $187 million was required, yet only 52% was funded, effectively meaning that aid actors could not respond to almost half of humanitarian needs that year. The situation was similar for Mali, where only 51% of a $324 million HRP was funded in 2019, as well as for Niger, where only 62% of a $236 million HRP was funded in 2019.[216]

Lack of coordination or a coherent approach

The situation in Liptako-Gourma represents a multi-faceted crisis that requires simultaneous humanitarian assistance, security intervention and development aid. While all three components currently have crucial importance, they come with very different modalities of intervention (in terms of approach and of required duration). Differing approaches seem to create problems in terms of negotiating access, particularly for local aid groups that might take longer to adjust from development to humanitarian mind-sets. Implementing the humanitarian principle of neutrality, for instance, requires them to distance themselves from their long-term governmental partners.[217] For this reason there is a need for coordination between different components of programming: to align necessary activities, their possible consequences, desired outcomes, unintended outcomes and possible compatibility of actions.

Linked to this, respondents have indicated that there is a need for enhanced coordination, both amongst (I)NGOs and between (I)NGOs and local and national authorities. They call for NGOs to take the initiative to foster greater coordination among themselves and other relevant actors to enhance their protection efforts and their access to vulnerable populations. For example, in Mali civil–military coordination has not yielded significant results, although efforts to enhance it were made.[218] This situation endangers aid workers and could further curtail access. UN peacekeepers and aid workers (particularly humanitarians) must strengthen their civil–military coordination as part of a wider effort to more clearly delineate and communicate their roles and responsibilities to the communities in which they operate. For instance, in 2019 the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) conducted training with 450 Malian partners (armed groups and members of civil society) to raise awareness about the role and mandate of humanitarian organizations, as well as an introduction to humanitarian principles. Given the current security context, awareness-raising campaigns and training about the importance of humanitarian action should be conducted with all actors

present on the ground, including leaders of non-state armed groups, self-defence militias, local and communal authorities, religious and community leaders, as well as humanitarians themselves. These efforts are essential if humanitarians are to gain official sanction to operate while maintaining the neutrality required to access populations in crisis.[219]

The aid organizations that continue to carry out distribution in Liptako-Gourma often do so by partnering with local and national organizations to intervene in hard-to-reach areas. This is particularly the case in the Malian rural areas of Intililt, Tessit and Ouatagouna (Gao region), Niafounké, Dire and Gossi (Timbuktu region) as we well as the south-east area of Ménaka, including some areas in Douentza. Most INGOs have integrated partnerships with local and national organizations that have a detailed and long-standing knowledge of the situation on the ground and how things really work at a grass-roots level. The partnerships are consolidated through funding, discussion, training, learning exchanges and long-term accompaniment. The social and cultural dynamics of the conflict in Mali has meant that local partner staff have been able to operate safely in areas where it has been impossible for international staff to travel. The level of integration between local and INGOs in the Malian regions of Liptako-Gourma offers valuable lessons for humanitarians active in the corresponding Nigerien and Burkinabe areas. Efforts should be undertaken to identify potential local partners and build their capacity in order to build a network that has greater access to remote or isolated areas in need.

State neglect and the shifting role of traditional authorities

There is, to varying extents across the three countries, minimal central state presence in the Liptako-Gourma region. Mali has a high degree of decentralization embedded in the state governance structure – comprising municipalities, circles or districts, and regions. Local authorities in regions, municipalities and districts are in charge of coordinating, overseeing and implementing services and policies at the local level from education, primary health care, sanitation, waste management, and water distribution and provision, among many others (see Annex 1).

However, regional and local authorities often lack the financial resources to implement services and govern. The reasons for this vary from context to context, but typically stem from the reticence of the central state to adequately empower decentralized units, and from the fact that the state itself often lacks resources and capacity. Yet, whether by design or lack of capacity, or a combination of the two, these circumstances have given rise to the feeling among local actors in Liptako-Gourma that they have been abandoned by the central state. This situation did not start in the 2010s, but goes further back in the history of these three post-colonial states. While tensions and difficulties have never been addressed by national governments, in recent years the situation has become unbearable, and has turned to violence

Due to state's absence and limited resources of the humanitarian organizations' acute shortages and infrastructure gaps can be attested, in some cases rendering key services such as refugee camps unsustainable. The Mentao camp in Burkina Faso which since 2012 has hosted many refugees from Mali, was attacked by a group of unidentified men, on the night of September 22 to 23, 2017. Schools and health posts in the

camp have been subsequently closed and basic services no longer provided. As local populations in and around Djibo are fleeing to other areas, refugees in Mentao camp have also expressed the intention to be relocated elsewhere. A lack of state security provisions can also curtail or push back humanitarian activities. The Goudoubo Refugee Camp near Dori was attacked twice by unidentified armed individuals in November and December 2019, and vehicles belonging to aid actors were attacked on their way back from the camp towards Dori on 22 December.

In some cases, local communities are obliged to turn to traditional authorities and non-state armed actors for basic governance provision and security. This has been especially true in Mali since the insurrection led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Din in northern Mali in 2012. Since then, the central state has been severely destabilized, forced to pull back from northern region sand, more recently, from parts of central regions more recently, ceding ground to rebel governance. In other cases, customary law administered by traditional chiefs and the religious norms governed by imams, religious scholars and qadis have played key roles in the administration of justice and the maintenance of social cohesion. This latter phenomenon offers a more optimistic outlook for humanitarian access. For example, in the Ménaka region, traditional and interim authorities have provided assistance to NGOs in the fields of security, justice, and human rights. In Niger, respondents in Tillabéri region indicated that the traditional chiefs were best fitted to resolve conflicts amid increasing tensions around natural resources between farmers and herders.

These traditional authorities can form key entry points for those seeking access to vulnerable populations. In fact, communal councils are already sharing information about their communities and their needs with aid actors. Interviews conducted in the Gao region show that it has been the role of communal councils to alert aid agencies about the needs observed among their populations. 'The communal council writes letters to aid actors to ask them for intervention for healthcare, food security, and livestock breeding,' said a local actor interviewed in Intililt.[220] This type of exchange should be encouraged, and a standard framework for communication between communal councils and aid actors should be developed to allow information to be shared rapidly and for timely humanitarian response. Communal councils could be trained in conducting need assessments within their communities, which could save time and resources.

However, even though traditional authorities can mediate and solve disputes between and within communities and individuals, they are usually not equipped to deal with major violations. As a consequence of the state absence in the Ménaka region, there is also a lack of judges operating there. Therefore, the only institution who documented cases of serious human rights violations is MINUSMA whose officials are restricted to operate within the town and its immediate surroundings. As a result, many violations remain unreported and undocumented. Moreover, traditional authorities themselves are not immune to the increased violence and instability they operate within. In light of increased attacks and incursions of villages by armed groups, compounded by the absence of military troops or police to protect civilians, several traditional chiefs have also fled and not returned, hence creating a vacuum of traditional authority. In November 2019, at least five traditional village chiefs were killed by suspected jihadist militants in the

Tillabéri region. One respondent in Tillabéri explained 'jihadists target populations so they don't cooperate with state authorities. The first targeted are village chiefs who are killed or kidnapped by militants. Most especially, if they suspect that these chiefs were working with state authorities.'

In addition to the targeting of traditional authorities by VEO's, the interference of community leaders in the implementation of humanitarian programmes, including the selection of beneficiaries, has raised concerns among humanitarians. In Gao, this has been described as an infringement of humanitarian principles.[221] It has also been reported that certain community leaders in the region have tried to force aid organizations to rent vehicles from them to access the areas in need, turning the crisis into a profitable business. In addition, leaders of armed groups and community leaders have also banned mixed-gender teams from operating in certain circles, forcing aid organizations to review the composition of their field units. This puts humanitarian organizations in a complex position, especially if they are perceived by militants as being supportive of or collaborating with the government. According to the context of operation, each organization needs to elaborate a strategy of collaboration with local actors.

CONCLUSION

Overall, respondents indicate that there is a need to balance the crisis response better with the development and stabilization efforts that are all taking place in Liptako-Gourma simultaneously. Across the board, respondents for this study indicate that while the humanitarian needs are pressing, it is actually the underlying conflict drivers that require the most attention at the moment in order to prevent the situation going from bad to worse – including in terms of ensuring access to the most vulnerable populations. This actually reinforce current EU's focus on local population and IDPs given the relatively low number of migrants in the area. Simultaneously, call for programming that focuses not so much on the situations of migrants in need of assistance as on programming that benefits local communities and displaced populations. The following section will provide some key takeaways from the study to take into account when developing new programming for the Liptako-Gourma region.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to answer the question to what extent mobility, such as migration, displacement and transhumance, is affected by violence in Liptako-Gourma – and with what consequences for migrants and other vulnerable populations. Its purpose is then to provide fine-grained insights into the interlinkages between mobility and conflict, and to thereby provide direct input into ongoing programming efforts regarding a wide range of interventions.

Taking into account the main findings above, we would first and foremost urge international aid organizations to refrain from approaching mobility in Liptako-Gourma from a hard security and border enforcement angle. For now, most mobility in Liptako-Gourma takes the form of short-term and seasonal movement and not northbound migration, and targeting these flows as such risks further disrupting livelihoods and bolstering farmer–herder conflicts. Current efforts focusing on local population and IDPs are the right approach as an overt focus on migration would mean losing sight of larger priorities, of which strengthening state capacity and bridging the gap between the central state and the socio-economically marginalized communities living in the rural areas of Liptako-Gourma would be the key priority in terms of supporting sustainable peace and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ALLEVIATE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON MOBILITY

On the basis of the outcomes of this study, we find that the down-spiralling of the security situation in Liptako-Gourma has, unsurprisingly, had a significant impact on population movement, including forced displacement, transhumance and migration. More specifically, the study shows that the most serious implication of the current conflict in Liptako-Gourma has been its effect on the mobility of local populations – and less so on northbound migration (including to Europe).

Circular migration and population movement within Liptako-Gourma have been part of the traditional lifestyle of local communities and a means to sustain their livelihoods. Individuals cross borders in Liptako-Gourma for a variety of reasons. People travel from one location to another to conduct trade at market hubs, to search for better employment opportunities, to visit their families, and to bring their herds to greener pastures. The impact of conflict on mobility is highest for local populations, on the one hand, as people have become afraid to engage in local forms of mobility due to the rise of insecurity. The growing use of IEDs across Liptako-Gourma has disrupted travelling and trading routes, as well as the local population's freedom of movement. On the other hand, is it equally important to acknowledge that the responses to the conflict and insecurity (such as reinforced border security and the states of emergency imposed in all the border regions – along with regu-

lations that for instance limit the use of vehicles and motorbikes) are restricting the ability of local populations to move across the borders and reach local and regional markets, neighbouring towns and localities for trade and commerce. This impacts the livelihoods and resilience of the populations that are highly dependent on mobility – and as such runs the risk of having a much longer-term negative effect on the development situation in the region.

In addition, there is a mass displacement of local populations fleeing violence in search of safety, protection and access to basic goods. The absence of state security and service provision, combined with the lack of humanitarian aid in rural areas on the borders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, has forced civilians to relocate to urban areas and other regions within their countries. The number of displaced people in the Liptako-Gourma region is very likely to increase throughout 2020. This will require further humanitarian efforts with better coordination in an already challenging security environment, especially in Burkina Faso, where the number of IDPs increased overwhelmingly within months. During interviews conducted in Ouagadougou, it was found that the majority of humanitarian and development organizations are still in early stages of setting up their operations, while struggling to get humanitarian access in parts of the Sahel and Est regions.[222] Humanitarian and development organizations in Mali and Niger have better access and existing operational mechanisms. However, rapid developments of ongoing conflicts forced evacuations in parts of the Tillabéri region while refugee camps are also being moved due to insecurity related to VEOs and intercommunity tensions. For instance, the Tabarey-barey and Mangaize camps are in the process of being, or have already been, relocated to Ayorou and Ouallam, respectively. For similar reasons, violence related to intercommunity tensions and VEOs continue to force displacement in Mali, mostly in Mopti and Ségou regions.

Recommendation 1: The current obstruction of local mobility due to conflict dynamics severely affects local livelihoods. International aid actors should **establish an action plan based on the necessary steps that would allow them to bridge the gap between the central state and socio-economically marginalized communities in Liptako-Gourma**. In this situation, the roles and needs of beneficiaries, i.e. of local communities and displaced populations, should be considered a priority. The centrality of the local communities should be the core of any strategy adopted in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. The needs of the beneficiaries concerning better public services, fair access to land and natural resources and governance should be the main objective of programming in the region. Another important component that has already been addressed by some existing projects[223] is the restoration of ruptured relations with security forces. Among subsequent steps should be considered ensuring accountability and compensation to individuals and families unfairly targeted by security forces. While at the present stage this can be very challenging, it will become a necessary future step in the building of confidence and trust between local communities and security forces. There is a need for a fine-grained analysis of the situation on the ground, reasons and causes of mistrust, with a step-by-step action plan on how to address these grievances first.

It goes without saying that support for such processes, and for longer-term development efforts, should take local dynamics into account. Strengthening state capacity in the rural areas could for instance be done through supporting small government 'centres' in the rural areas, which have a specific focus (e.g. land issues). However, it is of key importance to make sure that challenges that apply to the central state system (for instance corruption) are not duplicated at the local level. The same applies to support for long-term socio-economic development, among other things. Agriculture is an important economic activity in parts of the Liptako-Gourma, not only for the local population but also to seasonal migrants. Donors such as the European Union have reserved considerable funding for this and experience with agricultural projects focused in Agadez region of Niger. Similar efforts could be adapted to the Liptako-Gourma region. With a focus on agricultural projects, local population and seasonal migrants would have alternative income generating activities in areas struggling due to ongoing conflicts. As detailed in this study, untamed agricultural development, land management, access to water points, land encroachment and the narrowing of transhumance corridors are at the very centre of farmer–herder violence and thus intercommunal conflict in Liptako-Gourma. Hence, agriculture programming should be conflict sensitive and make a conscious effort to focus not only on supporting farmers, but also herders. In order to acknowledge the specificities of the local dynamics in Liptako-Gourma, but also to ensure buy-in from and access to the local communities, it is important to involve local actors in the development and implementation of the programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS MIGRANTS' VULNERABILITY TO ABUSE

People on the move in the Liptako-Gourma region face multiple risks from a variety of actors. They are subject to multiple protection incidents on the route, the most common one being extortion – which affects different forms of mobility, and not exclusively long-haul migrants. Also, extortion more or less affects men and women in the same manner. Other protection incidents are related to abuse, robbery and detention. Here, women are overall more vulnerable to these protection incidents (especially sexual abuse, physical abuse and robbery).

In addition, the increase in insecurity in the region has resulted in an increase in state security forces seeking to control movement through the region. Increased security control due to the counter-terrorist agenda and the implementation of border security and anti-smuggling measures, further compounded by efforts to control undocumented migration, provide security forces with measures for extortion of bribes from migrants. In fact, state security forces are among the key perpetrators of migrant abuse in all three countries under study here. This results in fear of security forces, which in turn may force people on the move to deviate from major routes and avoid controls by relying more on smugglers.

Recommendation 2: Make protection of local civilian population and IDPs, including migrants passing through, a key point in any discussions undertaken with security forces in the region. Given the dominant focus on (border) security, it is imperative that awareness is raised among members of the armed forces regarding the human rights of migrants, IDPs, refugees (and other citizens).[224] This should be part not only of migration- or border-related security collaboration but also of securitized counter-terrorism approaches.

International and national actors interviewed could not confirm the exploitation and recruitment of migrants by VEOs operating in Liptako-Gourma, or their involvement in the human-smuggling industry. This is in line with the findings from other studies on VEOs financial strategies, which indicate that VEOs in Liptako-Gourma typically rely on other – and more lucrative – types of illicit trafficking such as drugs to finance their activities. Our analysis of migrants' vulnerability on conflict-affected roads does show that members of the CMA and Platform, the armed signatories to the Peace Agreement in northern Mali, are linked to smugglers and to the exploitation of migrants – either by providing human smugglers with access to the territories under their control and/or by actively profiting from the vulnerable position of migrants at roadblocks by asking for money.

Recommendation 3: Engage in talks with CMA/Platform leadership to discuss migrant protection and the need to make this part of the signatories' human rights strategies. The EU could leverage the key role played by EU Special Envoy Losada in the implementation of the Malian Peace Agreement towards this end.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Access to vulnerable populations is a major challenge throughout the Liptako-Gourma region, and the situation is quickly deteriorating given the rise of intercommunal violence, attacks by VEOs and the proliferation of military operations. It should be noted that humanitarian and development actors providing protection to vulnerable populations currently have a limited presence and access in Liptako-Gourma. Increased instances of violent conflict provide the main impediment to access: there is a high level of targeting of humanitarian workers and other actors engaged in providing aid. Incidents include armed robberies, car hijacking, physical attacks and the deliberate targeting of aid workers by armed groups. In a context of rapid expansion of VEOs, bandits have also exploited the security vacuum to intimidate, attack and threaten civilians, to set up checkpoints and to loot villages. Armed bandits are often suspected to be behind attacks against aid convoys and humanitarian staff. Actors interviewed also indicated that in some areas – such as the Tillabéri region in Niger – it has become more difficult to identify actors controlling the area in order to negotiate access to areas where vulnerable groups are in need of relief and protection.

This situation is further compounded by the fact that, in a context of increased violence and hyper-militarization, the humanitarian/protection space has become narrowed down by the imposition of states of emergency and curfews. This has put heightened pressure on the actors working in the region and has

left them with less time to establish relations of trust with communities in need. In addition, humanitarian and development actors/international institutions and NGOs providing protection to vulnerable populations are required to travel with military escorts in some parts of Liptako-Gourma, which many have refused in compliance with humanitarian principles, and in order to preserve their neutrality and independence. Their refusal to comply with certain measures challenges their relationships with host governments and security forces.

Due to state absence and limited resources, aid organizations face acute shortages and infrastructure gaps, in some cases rendering key services such as refugee camps unsustainable. As a result, aid organizations – like local communities – are obliged to turn to traditional authorities and non-state armed actors for basic governance provision and security. Linked to this we see that the aid organizations that continue to carry out distribution in Liptako-Gourma often do so by partnering with local and national organizations to intervene in hard-to-reach areas.

Additional obstacles to accessing vulnerable populations come from the aid system itself. First of all, there is an overall lack of funding which limits the provision of aid and the scope of humanitarian access. Second, the situation in Liptako-Gourma represents a multi-faceted crisis that requires simultaneous humanitarian assistance, security intervention and development aid. While all three components currently have crucial importance, they come with very different modalities of intervention (in terms of both approach and required duration). Differing approaches seem to create problems in terms of negotiating access, particularly for local aid groups that might take longer to adjust from development to humanitarian mind-sets. Implementing the humanitarian principle of neutrality, for instance, requires them to distance themselves from their long-term governmental partners. Hence, there is a need for enhanced coordination and alignment between the various aid components active in the region. In particular, the study finds that there is a need to balance the crisis response better with development and stabilization efforts.

Across the board, respondents to this study indicate that while the humanitarian needs are pressing, it is actually the underlying conflict drivers that require the most attention at the moment in order to prevent the situation going from bad to worse – including in terms of assuring access to the most vulnerable populations. When questioned about the most pressing needs in the region, almost all interviewed humanitarian and development actors mentioned the need to find solutions to issues pertaining to governance, transhumance and informal gold mining in Liptako-Gourma, especially on the Nigerien and Burkina Faso borders. Although it was not this report's purview to study exhaustively conflict dynamics in the region, its findings confirm that these issues need to be addressed, as they constitute key drivers of conflict and insecurity – and hence, by extension, the increased need for protection in the region.

At the same time, there is room for improvement in terms of coordination and alignment of aid responses to the challenges in Liptako-Gourma.

Recommendation 4: Involve traditional authorities in the programming, taking existing difficulties into account. To safeguard and expand upon existing access it is essential for aid actors to foster acceptance and gain the trust of communities, including local and traditional authorities. Informing prominent community figures of distributions and projects to be implemented within their networks is essential to ensure their buy-in and support. By developing and maintaining a relationship of trust with these authorities, aid actors can access communities more easily and better understand their needs in order to ensure a tailored response. In turn, local and traditional authorities will be more willing to raise awareness among their communities about the role of aid actors and the humanitarian sector.

As such, humanitarian actors should continue engaging with local stakeholders (village chiefs, community leaders, women's and youth groups, as well as religious leaders) to gain their trust and support. This engagement can take place in situ – it is not uncommon for traditional leaders to appoint a representative to accompany humanitarian teams during their interventions within communities. As aid actors become increasingly accepted by communities, they are likely to benefit from the protection and early warning systems that such communities can offer in times of potential danger. As the identity and territorial control of armed actors are often unclear or complex, aid organizations will have to rely upon pre-existing community interlocutors as an initial point of contact, hence the importance of developing relationships and trust with communities from an early stage.

Imported foodstuff from Algeria in Ménaka, Mali

However, it is important to recognize possible limitations and shortcomings of engagement with such authorities. Traditional chiefs have been increasingly targeted by VEOs in recent years, especially if they are perceived as allies of the state, which means that any engagement with such actors must be conflict sensitive and most likely discreet. Traditional figures are targets often because their removal would disrupt inter- and intra-community stability. In Burkina Faso, religious leaders – both Christian and Muslim – have been directly targeted, mainly in the north. In the first half of 2019 multiple attacks were carried out against churches in northern Burkina Faso, with gunmen opening fire upon worshippers and priests. Furthermore, jihadist groups do not consider certain Muslim clerics to be sufficiently devout, and often accuse them of having collaborated with the authorities. It should be taken into consideration that overt dealings with aid and health workers could expose such individuals to greater risks of attacks and kidnapping. Humanitarian actors must, on the one hand, ensure that the traditional authorities they deal with comply with their core principles. On the other hand, they need to invest in awareness raising and information sharing concerning their neutrality.

Recommendation 5: International donors, such as the EU, could provide support for better coordination – especially when it comes to negotiating access – among the various humanitarian and development actors providing protection to vulnerable populations. The EU could also support its implementing partners in negotiations with national governments when reviewing the obligation to use military escorts.

It is fair to say that conflict evolved quickly in Burkina Faso in particular, forcing humanitarian actors to intervene immediately, leaving them with no time to develop adequate humanitarian access strategies. However, there are multiple lessons from Mali and Niger that these organizations could learn from and tailor to the Burkinabe context. For instance, in Mali communal councils are in communication with aid agencies, and alert them about the needs observed among their populations. This type of practice should be encouraged in Burkina Faso and in conflict-affected areas in general in Mali and Niger.

A further step could be a standard framework between communal councils and aid actors to allow information to be shared rapidly and to allow timely humanitarian response. Communal councils could be trained in conducting needs assessments within their community. Simultaneously, measures should accompany this approach to prevent community councils and leaders getting involved in the selection of beneficiaries. This could be perceived as an infringement of humanitarian principles. Along the same lines, encourage the inclusion of host communities as much as possible, and create broader surveillance committees to monitor humanitarian assistance operations, even if this is just weekly meetings to exchange information and experiences. This ensures their buy-in and helps aid agencies to keep track of the impact of the increased population on their livelihoods and the potential for schemes by outsiders or anyone seeking to exploit the vulnerabilities of migrants (extortion, smuggling, forced labour etc.).

Niger and Mali also offer lessons on how to work in areas where access for INGOs is impossible. Most INGOs have integrated partnerships with local and national organizations that have a detailed and long-standing knowledge of the situation on the ground and how things really work at a grass-roots level. The partnerships are consolidated through funding, discussion, training, learning exchanges and long-term mentoring. The social and cultural dynamics of the conflict in Mali has meant for example that local partner staff have been able to operate safely in areas where it has been impossible for international staff to travel. This approach should be duplicated in areas where the state remains absent, and where international aid agencies cannot establish operational offices.

At the same time, care should be taken not to fall back on blueprint approaches and response plans for the region. There are overarching characteristics that are the same throughout Liptako-Gourma (current conflict and instability dynamics and their root causes), but blanket responses will not do. The humanitarian context remains quite different in Burkina Faso (very dire, parallel interventions needed) and Niger (state systems still more or less running, support through existing systems still possible). There is an immediate need to coordinate responses among the various humanitarian and development actors providing protection to vulnerable populations – in line with the OCHA's coordinated efforts to establish safe zones, corridors or temporary distribution points.

Such coordination should start with a mapping exercise of mandates of the UN, INGOS and the local NGOs that operate in the area. The reasons for this are twofold. First, when international organizations withdraw due to security risks, local NGOs are more likely to take over the provision of humanitarian assistance. Care should be taken to ensure that they are properly trained and equipped to do this without putting their lives in danger as well. At the same time, some of these NGOs might come from a development or civil society organization background. If they are seen to be operating as humanitarians by the local population and/or by the VEOs, then their choices will have an impact on the perception of neutrality, humanity and independence of humanitarians more generally. This could potentially harm the safety of international aid providers when they (re)establish their presence in certain regions. Through the mapping exercise, these risks could be calculated.

There is also a need to encourage and facilitate efforts between all agencies (whilst staying mindful of the different mandates) on communicating on the key red lines underlying access negotiations. The danger when this does not happen is that armed groups or VEOs might engage in parallel sets of access negotiations with the different actors in the region. If one actor agrees on certain conditions on access that violate humanitarian principles, this would make it much harder for other organizations to continue to draw a line. The EU could support training in negotiating access for its implementing partners or facilitate a coordinated dialogue about this.

The same logic could be applied to coordinating the mechanism for withdrawal as a result of safety and security concerns, and the option of taking collective action in escalation of the 'threat' to suspend humanitarian activities. The impact of a large number of humanitarian organizations considering leaving the area

is enormous. The possibility of staying is conditional on the necessary safety and security guarantees and a respect for humanitarian principles. To negotiate about these conditions, it is useful to have a common approach. Those on the other end of the negotiations could even play out the differences between organizations and make separate agreements with some and not others. The corollary to that is to coordinate conditions for return. A clear roadmap of such steps gives room for manoeuvre during negotiations with armed groups. If a choice is made to suspend activities, consider coordinating backchannels to try as much as possible to preserve communication lines with communities or even the armed groups themselves. Some organizations have insider mediators, or trusted third-party mediators in a humanitarian context, who maintain links and can, if necessary, possible and desirable, communicate messages or requests.

Lastly, to protect all staff, there is a need to understand the motivations behind the targeting of aid workers and the theft of vehicles. Humanitarian organizations should investigate further and consider hiring more (or exclusively) locally if security concerns mainly pertain to international/Western aid workers. At the same time, they should also be extremely careful, as this might increase the risk of local staff being seen as informants. They should be sure to hire at least some people with sufficient standing in the community not to face such a risk (as opposed to exclusively employing people mainly in need of work).

Livestock market in Ménaka, Mali

NOTES

1. This is a highly stylized distinction. In reality, mobility is not always linear as people may change their trajectories, stop on the way, migrate and re-migrate very often.

2. The companion study on the dynamics of human trafficking in the Sahel show that these factors contribute to the vulnerability of migrants to human trafficking. See A. Malekooti, *The Intersection of Irregular Migration and Trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel: Understanding the Patterns of Vulnerability*, Geneva: Global Initiative, forthcoming.

3. With the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration, member states have endorsed a human rights-based roadmap for international governance of migration. This roadmap should be turned into actions implemented by national, regional and local authorities with the support of international organizations while ensuring the establishment of a monitoring system to evaluate progress and identify remaining gaps.

4. The geographical definition of Liptako-Gourma varies, and sometimes parts of Mopti and Timbuktu regions are included. However, for this study the geographical definition is limited to parts of the Gao and Ménaka regions of Mali, the Sahel and Est regions of Burkina Faso, and the Tillabéri region of Niger.

5. During the ongoing negotiations between Iyad and the Malian government the former required removal of French military forces.

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34. In reality, mobility is not always linear as people may change their trajectories, stop on the way, migrate and re-migrate very often.

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52. Interview with herders in Intililt, January 2020

53. Interviews conducted in Ménaka and Gao regions, December 2019 and January 2020.

54. Interview with a herder in Torodi, November 2019

55. Livelihoods are dependent on natural resources management and on mobility, two basic and interlinked elements for survival. There is a multiplicity of short-haul and medium-haul travellers crossing the borders, and often living off this mobility.

56. Interviews with local youth in Sahel region, Burkina Faso, January 2020.

57. Interviews conducted in Gao, Mali January 2020.

58. Interviews conducted in the Tillabéri region, Niger; the Sahel and Est region, Burkina Faso; and the Gao region, Mali, December 2019 and January 2020. This is also confirmed by general patterns within IOM data collected in the three countries.

59. Among reports discussing such mobility strategies are: Reitano and Shaw, *People's Perspectives of Organized Crime in West Africa and the Sahel*; F. Molenaar, *Irregular Migration and Human Smuggling Networks in Niger*, CRU report, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2017, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/irregular_migration_and_human_smuggling_networks_in_niger_0.pdf; L. Raineri, Human smuggling across Niger: state-sponsored protection rackets and contradictory security imperatives, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 56:1 (2018), pp. 63–86.

60. See the research by IOM on artisanal gold mining in Burkina Faso: IOM, *Résumé de recherche – Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre: Dynamiques migratoires vers les sites d'orpaillage au Burkina Faso: Le cas des sites de Warweogo et Galgouli*, 2019, https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/Research%20 Brief%20BF_Mines_november%20_Final%206%20Janvier.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=7528

61. OECD, *Africa's Urbanisation Dynamics 2020: Africapolis, Mapping a New Urban Geography*, Paris: OECD, 2020, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/africa-s-urbanisation-dynamics-2020_b6bccb81-en

62. S. Mercandalli and B. Losch, *Rural Africa in Motion: Dynamics and Drivers of Migration South of the Sahara*, FAO and CIRAD, 2017, http://www.fao.org/3/I7951EN/i7951en.pdf

63. Interview with former Burkinabe gendarme, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2020.

64. I. A. Yonlihinza, As more people flock to Niger's gold mine, economic boon may become a new migration risk, *The Conversation*, 2017, https://theconversation.com/as-more-people-flock-to-nigers-gold-mines-economic-boon-may-become-a-new-migration-risk-75417

65. IOM, *Résumé de recherche – Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre*.

66. MMC West Africa 4Mi Snapshot – February 2020 http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/ uploads/2020/02/089_snapshot_wa.pdf

67. Interviews with local youth in Ménaka, Mali, December 2019.

68. Interviews with local youth in Andéramboukane, December 2019.

69. The data provided in this box is based on data from IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix. It provides only a partial view of the volume and characteristics of population flows transiting through the region. For more information see https://displacement.iom.int/content/methodological-framework-used-displacement-tracking-matrix-operations-quantifying

70. IOM, *DTM Flow Monitoring Mali, Results Snapshot #30*, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/ files/resources/ML_FMP_Snapshot_July18_No30_EN.pdf. According to the study by Molenaar and Van Damme, between 30 000 and 40 000 migrants transited through Mali to Algeria and Libya in 2016: F. Molenaar and T. Van Damme, *Irregular Migration and Human Smuggling Networks in Mali*, CRU Report, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2017, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/irregular_migration_and_human_smuggling_networks_in_mali.pdf

71. DTM–IOM, *DTM Monthly Dashboards on Mali, between July and December 2019*, 2019. According to data collected by IOM DRIM in Mali and the region, DTM enumerators at the FMPs in Mali predominantly interview migrants who claim to be making long-haul journeys to one of the European countries.

72. IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix, Burkina Faso: Rapport sur le suivi des flux de populations, decembre 2019*, Geneva: IOM, 2019, https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/FMP%20 DASHBOARD%20Suivi%20des%20flux%20migratoires%20Burkina%20Faso%20Decembre%202019_ BF.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=7697

73. IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix, Niger: Rapport sur le suivi des flux de populations, decembre 2019*, Geneva: IOM, 2019, https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/OIM%20Niger%20-%20 Migration%20Response%20-%20Flow%20Monitoring%20Report%20-%20FR%20-%20Decembre%20 2019%20-%20Niger_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=7727

74. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 46.

75. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 56.

76. It should be noted that the programme is not always based on demand but rather on available funds.

77. IOM, *2018 Return and Reintegration Key Highlights*, IOM, Geneva: IOM, 2019, https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/2018_return_and_reintegration_key_highlights.pdf

78. V. Digidiki and J. Bhabha, *Returning Home? The Reintegration Challenges Facing Child and Youth Returnees from Libya to Nigeria*, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University, 2019, https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2464/2019/11/Harvard-FXB-Center-Returning-Home-FINAL.pdf

79. According to the information collected during an interview with a transportation company in January 2020. Because of the lucrative nature of the business, employees of private bus companies interviewed in Mali continue to travel across central and northern Mali despite the multiple dangers. One driver working for such a company in Mali said that drivers involved in transporting migrants can receive between 1 000 and 2 000 FCFA per migrant. Drivers have also developed ways to negotiate with actors controlling different checkpoints, including armed groups controlling checkpoints between Gao and Algerian borders. Drivers interviewed also claimed to negotiate in favor of migrants so they don't get abused.

80. Timbuktu is undoubtedly less popular than Gao for a variety of reasons – mostly because of its longer and more dangerous desert route than that from Gao. Nonetheless, during the rainy season it is more easily reachable by the river Niger. This route can be chosen in order to avoid checkpoints.

81. Interviews conducted in Bamako and Gao, Mali, November 2019 and January 2020.

82. Interviews conducted in Bamako and Gao, Mali, November 2019 and January 2020.

83. Interviews conducted in Bamako and Gao, Mali, November 2019 and January 2020, see also Micallef, *The Human Conveyor Belt.*

84. Interviews conducted in Bamako and Gao, November 2019 and January 2020.

85. Ibid.

86. Interviews conducted in Gao, Mali, August 2019.

87. Interviews conducted with migrants and humanitarian actor in Bamako, Mali, November 2019.

88. Interviews conducted with migrants and transportation companies in Bamako, Mali and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2020.

89. In the last quarter of 2019 80% of interviewees were Burkinabe and 7% were from Niger, which is consistent with the data from the rest of the year as well as 2018. IOM–DTM, *Rapport sur le suivi des populations: Burkina Faso*, 2019, https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/FMP%20DASHBOARD%20Suivi%20des%20flux%20migratoires%20Burkina%20Faso%20Decembre%202019_BF.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=7697 and IOM–DTM, *Burkina Faso, suivi des flux de populations: Analyse d'enquêtes individuelles réalisées de janvier à décembre 2018 aux points de suivi des flux de Kantchari, Dori/Seytenga, Ouagadougou, Faramana et Yendere*, 2019, https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/Rapport-FMS_BFA_Analyse%20narrative-FINAL_OM_last_BFnew-.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=6871

90. UNHCR, *Country Operation Update Niger/July 2018*, 2018, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/65147

91. Interviews conducted in Kantchari and Fada-N'Gourma, Est region, Burkina Faso, January 2020.

92. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 30.

93. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 30.

94. Interviews conducted with transportation companies in Niamey, Niger, November 2019.

95. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 50

96. Because the IOM centre in Ouagadougou only accounts for arrivals and not departures, it is difficult to track whether the route goes via Burkina Faso's capital, but also whether some of the travellers coming from Benena to Ouagadougou eventually continue their journey to Niger.

97. International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Tracking Conflict Worldwide*, December 2018, https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/december-2018; Attaque axe Dori-Seytenga: Trois gendarmes blessés et des véhicules calcinés, *Agence d'information du Burkina*, 5 December 2018, https://www.aib.media/regions/2018/12/05/attaque-axe-dori-seytenga-trois-gendarmes-blesses-et-des-vehicules-calcines/

98. Interviews conducted with transportation companies in Ouagdougou, Burkina Faso, February 2020

99. I. Austen, Gunmen in Burkina Faso attack Canadian mining company convoy, killing 37, New York Times, 6 November 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/world/africa/burkina-mine-attack-canadian.html

100. UNMAS, *Burkina Faso*, https://unmas.org/en/programmes/burkina-faso

101. F. Kelly, Eight Burkina Faso soldiers killed in roadside bomb blast near Baraboule, *The Defense Post*, 26 September 2018, https://thedefensepost.com/2018/09/26/burkina-faso-soldiers-killed-roadside-bomb-baraboule/

102. Danish Refugee Council and UNHCR. 2019. *Rapport de monitoring de protection, regions du Sahel et Centre Nord.*

103. Micallef, *The Human Conveyor Belt.*

104. On 1 January 2020, for example, a MINUSMA vehicle struck an IED near Ansongo on the road between Niamey, Niger and Gao, Mali. See C. Weiss, JNIM targets military bases in central Mali, *FDD's Long War Journal*, 27 January 2020, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/01/jnim-targets-military-bases-in-central-mali.php

105. Mali says 54 are killed in jihadist attack on army; ISIS claims responsibility, *New York Times*, 2 November 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/02/world/africa/mali-jihadist-attack.html?auth=login-email&login=email

106. Malijet.co., Labbezanga, ville fantôme, 23 January2020, http://malijet.co/nord-mali/labbezanga-ville-fantome

107. Studio Tamani, Retrait 'stratégique' de l'armée de certaines localités: les populations 'désemparées', 11 November 2019, https://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/themes/politique/21918-retrait-strategique-de-l-armee-de-certaines-localites-les-populations-desemparees ; RFI, Mali: l'armée se replie de ses positions isolées après des attaques jihadistes, 11 November 2019, http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20191111-mali-armee-fama-replie-positions-isolees-apres-attaques-jihadistes

108. Interviews conducted in Ménaka and Gao regions, December 2019 and January 2020.

109. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel.*

110. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel.*

111. The region of Tillabéri was first placed under a state of emergency in March 2017 following an increase in attacks targeting refugee camps and security forces.

112. Niger: State of emergency extended in three regions as of December 18, *GardaWorld*, 22 January 2020, https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/307306/niger-state-of-emergency-extended-in-three-regions-as-of-december-18

113. During the second half of 2019, according to the data of IOM's DTM, the gender ratio is around 30% female to 70% male, with slight variations. This ratio is typical for internal regional movements. In regional and more local movements the percentage of women is significantly higher than in the northbound flows, in particular in the direction of Europe (around 15% of women en route to Europe).

114. IOM DTM, Niger – Flow Monitoring Report for July, August, September, October, November and December 2019.

115. Local markets depend heavily on foodstuff and subsidized goods brought by Algerian traders.

116. Interviews conducted in Ménaka, December 2019.

117. According to the data of Mixed Migration Center (2019) women amounted to 20% of all respondents, while according to the data collected by IOM's DTM for West and Central Africa in the period between April and June 2019, 28% of interviewed migrants were women. Compare with IOM, *Quarterly Migration Report West and Central Africa April–June 2019*, Geneva: IOM, 2019, https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/IOM%20West%20and%20Central%20Africa%20Flow%20Monitoring%20Report%20Q2-2019-V4.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=6538 ; Mixed Migration Centre, Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel.

118. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 70

119. Mixed Migration Centre, MMC West Africa 4 Mi Snapshot, September 2019, http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/073_snapshot_wa_english.pdf

120. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 70.

121. E. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts: The Evolving Role of Smugglers in West Africa's Migration Economy*, Briefing Paper, Mixed Migration Centre, 2019, p. 28, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/69916

122. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 59.

123. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 63.

124. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 59.

125. See http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/073_snapshot_wa_english.pdf Due to the difficult sampling environment in studies that survey migrant populations it is important to always interpret results as these and other data collection mechanisms on migration flows with caution.

126. Interviews with transportation companies in Bamako, Mali and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2020.

127. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 44. Among those who used services of smugglers, most perceive them as service providers.

128. In 2019 4Mi monitors on the ground did not encounter any smugglers. Nevertheless, 25% of Burkinabe migrants interviewed in Niger and 20% of Burkinabe migrants interviewed in Mali stated that they had started their journeys with the help of a smuggler. This inconsistency may be explained by the migrants having established contacts with smugglers in northern Mali and Niger to facilitate their journeys through the desert at the start of their travels. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 41.

129. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 45.

130. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts*, p. 17.

131. While the majority of migrants (75%) approached smugglers themselves, a significant number of migrants (69%) were referred to smugglers by mutual friends, family or acquaintances. As expected, those who started their journeys with the help of smugglers continued them with the facilitation of smugglers (75%).

132. Most respondents interviewed (86%) reported that accommodation was the main service they received. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts*, p. 19.

133. Furthermore, 48% of smugglers operating and interviewed in Mali said they had contact someone was on the other side of the border to receive their clients. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts*, p. 23.

134. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts*, p. 27.

135. Interviews conducted in Gao, Mali, August 2019.

136. J. Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

137. Reitano and Shaw, *People's Perspectives of Organized Crime*.

138. Ibid.

139. In 2012, Mali adopted a Law on Combating, Trafficking in Persons and Similar Practices. The law includes offence provisions on human smuggling, which it considers as an 'assimilated practice' to trafficking. Both trafficking and smuggling offences carry the same sentence of between five and ten years' imprisonment. Apparently this was the first case of implementation of this law since its adoption. Another important case of repression of human trafficking and smuggling was an INTERPOL-led operation in October 2019 against human traffickers when police conducted raids at known trafficking and smuggling hotspots in the country. The nearly seventy victims identified and rescued came from Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria, and were working in bars, homes and mining sites. Four suspected traffickers have been detained and are awaiting sentencing. Investigations are ongoing to identify additional suspects. INTERPOL, Trafficking victims rescued during INTERPOL-coordinated operation in Mali, 8 November 2019, https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2019/Trafficking-victims-rescued-during-INTERPOL-coordinated-operation-in-Mali

140. This resonates with the findings of the UN Panel of Experts on Mali: see UNSC, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali*.

141. Interviews with smugglers and transporters in Gao in August 2019, and January 2020.

142. Interviews conducted in Bamako and Gao, November 2019 and January 2020.

143. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*.

144. Molenaar, F. and T. Van Damme, *Irregular Migration and Human Smuggling Networks in Mali*, p.17

145. Bamada.net, Mali: La Carte Nina est Désormais un Document d'Identification, 8 February 2016, http://bamada.net/mali-la-carte-nina-est-desormais-un-document-didentification

146. Molenaar, F, Tubiana, J. Warin, C. (2018). *Caught in the middle: A human rights and peace-building approach to migration governance in the Sahel.*

147. For a detailed discussion of migration governance in the Liptako-Gourma countries, see Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, pp. 33–44.

148. P. M. Frowd, Producing the 'transit' migration state: International security intervention in Niger, *Third World Quarterly*, 41:2 (2020), pp. 340–58.

149. F. Molenaar et al., *Caught in the Middle: A Human Rights and Peace-Building Approach to Migration Governance in the Sahel*, CRU Report, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, December 2018, https://www.clingendael.org/publication/human-rights-approach-migration-governance-sahel.

150. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts*, p. 19.

151. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts.*

152. W. Assanvo et al., *Violent Extremism, Organised Crime and Local Conflicts in Liptako-Gourma*, West Africa Report no. 26, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2019, https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf

153. D. Lounnas, *The Links between Jihadi Organisations and Illegal Trafficking in the Sahel*, MENARA Working Papers, no. 25, Rome: Instituto Affari Internazionali, 2018, pp. 4–5, https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_25.pdf

154. Interviews conducted in Gao and Bamako, Mali, August and November 2019, and January 2020.

155. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts*, p. 21.

156. Interview with a migrant in Gao, 20 January 2019.

157. UNSC, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali.*

158. Interview with a local actor in Ménaka, January 2020.

159. Interviews conducted in Ménaka, Anouzagrene and Andéramboukane, Mali, November 2019.

160. Interviews conducted in Ménaka, Anouzagrene and Andéramboukane, Mali, November 2019.

161. Interviews conducted in Gao, January 2020.

162. Interviews conducted in Gao, Mali, January 2020.

163. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 63.

164. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, pp. 57–8.

165. Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime Companion study on human trafficking.

166. http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/089_snapshot_wa.pdf

167. Interviews conducted in Ménaka, December 2019.

168. Interviews conducted in Gao, Mali, January 2020. Global Initiative – Migration through Mali.

169. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 62.

170. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 62.

171. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 47

172. Interview with a migrant in Sebba, Yagha province, Sahel Region, Burkina Faso, January 2020.

173. Interview with a local actor in Fada, Est region, December 2019.

174. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 63.

175. Mixed Migration Centre, *Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel*, p. 64.

176. Interviews with local and traditional authorities in Torodi, Tillabéri region, Niger, December 2019.

177. Interviews with local and traditional authorities, and local NGO in Torodi, Tillabéri region, Niger, December 2019.

178. This was earlier identified by Molenaar et al., *Caught in the Middle*.

179. Golovko, *Players of Many Parts*, p. 29.

180. Interview conducted with a migrant in Dougourou, Tillabéri region, December 2019. Another local official interviewed in Dougourou confirmed collusion between police officers and migrant smugglers. 'There is a notable participation of police officers,' he said. 'One day, I was on a bus to Niamey when a police officer stopped the bus and started verifying identity documents of passengers. The driver stood up and told him, "These five here are with me." The officer didn't check the papers of these five persons. I later learned that the driver, who had received money to transport these migrants, gave a percentage to the police officer.' It was found that Nigerien police or military officers request a higher amount of money from non-Nigerien migrants. Interview with local authorities in Tillabéri town, Tillabéri region, December 2019.

181. Interview with a government actor in Torodi, November 2019.

182. This also means that such migrants go undetected at Flow Monitoring Points at border crossings.

183. Interview with rural agent in Torodi, November 2019.

184. Interview with a tax collector in Téra, December 2019.

185. Interview with civil servant in Diagourou, Tillabéri region, Niger, December 2019.

186. Interview with local authorities in Labbezanga, Gao, January 2020.

187. Interview with a gendarme in Labbezanga, January 2020.

188. Interview conducted with NGO worker in Ouagadougou, October 2019.

189. Interview conducted with NGO worker in Djibo, Sahel region, January 2020.

190. Interview with a government actor in Fada, Est region, December 2019.

191. Interview with a rural agent in Torodi, December 2019.

192. Interview with a civil servant in Diagourou, December 2019.

193. Interviews conducted in Torodi and Téra, Tillabéri region, December 2019.

194. Interviews conducted in Torodi and Téra, Tillabéri region, December 2019.

195. M. J. da Silva Rebelo et al., Mistrust, anger, and hostility in refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants: A systematic review, *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 59:3 (2018), pp. 239–51.

196. OCHA, *Niger: Aperçu des besoins humanitaires*.

197. OCHA, *Mali – Qui Fait Quoi Ou (3W) Présence opérationnelle des acteurs humanitaires*, November 2019, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MLI_VIZ_3W-Communes_20191130_vf---PDF.pdf

198. OCHA, *Rapport de situation Mali*, Geneva, 28 January 2020, https://reports.unocha.org/fr/country/mali/

199. S. Mednick, Briefing: Burkina Faso's rapid descent catches emergency response off guard, *The New Humanitarian*, 20 November 2019, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2019/12/20/Burkina-Faso-displaced-attacks-extremist

200. OCHA, *Burkina-Faso: Présence opérationelle*, 5 November 2019, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/operations/burkina-faso/presence-operationnelle

201. OCHA, *Tillabéri: Presence operationelle des acteurs humanitaire*, 2019, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/niger/tillaberi-pr%C3%A9sence-op%C3%A9rationnelle-des-acteurs-humanitaires

202. The International NGO Security Organisation (INSO)

203. OCHA, *Mali: Rapport de situation.*

204. UNHCR, *Insecurity Hinders Access to Displaced.*

205. UNHRC, *Rapport d'analyse mensuelle des données de monitoring de protection*, November 2019, https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/rapport-d-analyse-mensuelle-des-donn-es-de-monitoring-de-protection-ao-t-2019-tillab-ri

206. Interview with humanitarian actor in Tillabéri, December 2019.

207. Interview with humanitarian organisation active in Tillaberi and Sahel regions, February 2020.

208. ACAPS, *CrisisInSight, Humanitarian Accces Overview*, October 2019, https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20191031_acaps_humanitarian_access_overview_october_2019.pdf

209. Danish Refugee Council and UNHCR, *Rapport de monitoring de protection, régions du Sahel et Centre Nord.*

210. OCHA, *Niger: Aperçu des besoins humanitaires.*

211. Interview with herder in Abala, December 2019.

212. https://www.sig.gov.bf/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=182&cHash=9c30126d4ec2f77177518a73bffa0a5a

213. https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article87271

214. https://www.jeuneafrique.com/844319/politique/mali-letat-durgence-a-nouveau-prolonge/

215. Mednick, Briefing: Burkina Faso's rapid descent catches emergency response off guard.

216. Burkina Faso: https://fts.unocha.org/countries/36/summary/2019 / Mali: https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/913/summary ; Niger: https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/908/summary

217. Mednick, Briefing: Burkina Faso's rapid descent catches emergency response off guard'.

218. https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/breves/barkhane-l-equipe-de-cooperation-civilo-militaire-malienne; https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2013_07_22_UN_Coordination_civil_militaire_UN_CMCOORD.pdf

219. A. Lamarche, *Mali's Humanitarian Crisis: Overmilitarized and Overshadowed*, 12 December 2019, Washington, DC: Refugees International, https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2019/12/10/malis-humanitarian-crisis-overmilitarized-and-overshadowed

220. Interview with a local actor in Intililt, January 2020.

221. OCHA, *Accès humanitaire au Mali: Pour des stratégies d'accès plus adaptées*, October 2019, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/mli_rpt_humaccessavrilsept_20191010_vf.pdf

222. Access is also limited in other regions, but for the purpose of this study, the focus is on the Sahel and Est regions.

223. Among others https://danishdemininggroup.dk/danish-demining-group/where-we-work/sahel

224. With the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration, member states have endorsed a human rights-based roadmap for international governance of migration. This roadmap should be turned into actions implemented by national, regional and local authorities with the support of international organizations while ensuring the establishment of a monitoring system to evaluate progress and identify remaining gaps.

Mobility and conflict in Liptako-Gourma

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**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

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