

Irregular migration and human smuggling networks in Niger

CRU Report

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Netherlands Institute of International Relations



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CRU Report
February 2017

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Cover photo: Two stranded off-road vehicles in the dunes between Agadem and Bilma in the eastern Niger. © Wikimedia Commons / Holger Reineccius

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Abstract

This report outlines some of the dilemmas that the human smuggling industry poses for policy makers addressing irregular migration flows in Niger. Through a detailed focus on the manifestation of the relationship between human smugglers and state authorities on the ground, and between state authorities and former rebels more generally, this report shows that the development of human smuggling networks reinforces prevailing patterns of collusion between armed and/or criminal actors, state security forces and political elites. Any attempt to address irregular migration through securitised measures should take into account that security forces, local authorities and even national political elites are tied to the smuggling industry in direct and indirect ways. They are not neutral actors, and any attempt to treat them as such could result in heightened conflict risk and/or the instrumental use of policy instruments to take out competitors. Policy makers should also recognise that the issue of irregular migration is tied to broader issues of good governance and rule of law. Policies targeting migration should therefore form part of a broader package of measures combatting state fragility and insecurity.

Executive Summary

This report outlines some of the dilemmas that the human smuggling industry poses for policy makers addressing irregular migration flows in Niger. Human smuggling networks form an important financial resource in one of the poorest countries in the world and drive a substantial formal and informal economy. The networks provide economic opportunities to young people, who are generally excluded from socioeconomic life, and offer an out for unemployed workers and others whose livelihoods have been threatened by climatic challenges and famine. In the short term, the human smuggling industry thereby contributes to stability through its mitigation of sources of radicalisation and political conflict. In the long term, however, human smuggling networks feed patterns of elitist rule that stand in the way of meaningful solutions to Niger's perpetual underdevelopment.

Through a more detailed focus on the manifestation of the relationship between human smugglers and state authorities on the ground, and between state authorities and former rebels more generally, this report also shows that the development of human smuggling networks reinforces prevailing patterns of collusion between armed and/or criminal actors, state security forces and political elites. On the one hand, this creates stability potential as these relations help finance security forces in a country surrounded by extremist threats and contribute to a system of tribal elite cooptation into a larger system of governance. On the other hand, this strategy is only successful as long as it serves the main players' interests—as evidenced by recent unrest in northern Niger that can be tied directly to intra-elite disagreements.

The largest problem that Niger faces today is that while migration has not changed that much over the last decade, European normative acceptance of migration has. Targeting locally accepted and normalised human smuggling practices that are firmly embedded in local economic, political and security networks poses severe challenges to policy makers. Any attempt to address irregular migration through securitised measures should take into account that security forces, local authorities and even national political elites are tied to the smuggling industry in direct and indirect ways. They are not neutral actors, and any attempt to treat them as such could result in heightened conflict risk and/or the instrumental use of policy instruments to take out competitors. The issue of irregular migration is tied to broader issues of good governance and rule of law. Policies targeting migration should therefore form part of a broader package of measures combatting state fragility and insecurity.

In addition, any attempt to tackle the human smuggling industry should bear in mind that not all migration flows passing through Niger have Europe as their final destination. The danger exists that intraregional migration patterns—a true (temporal) escape valve

for people facing climatic challenges and poverty—will be undermined due to current efforts to stop all migration. It can also not be reiterated enough that migration in Niger mainly constitutes a legal and profitable phenomenon that—for stability’s sake—would require realistic alternatives if it were to be rooted out. A better appreciation of the relationship between migration and (in)stability in informal economies in desert towns and regions is required to identify concrete entry points for development actions that would be able to address these challenges.¹

Map of Niger



1 This report is part of the research project 'Turning the Tide: The Politics of Irregular Migration in the Sahel and Libya.' For policy recommendations to address irregular migration in Niger and beyond, see Molenaar, F. and El Kamouni-Janssen, F. 2017. *Turning the Tide: The Politics of Irregular Migration in the Sahel and Libya*, CRU report, The Hague, the Clingendael Institute.

Introduction

The Nigerien territory, which covers 1,267,000 km² and borders Libya, Algeria, Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad constitutes a strategic location within the trans-Saharan irregular migration corridor.² Conservative estimates suggest that since 2000 some 100,000 migrants have passed through Niger each year, with this year possibly forming a peak at 330,000 migrants.³ The steady increase in migrants, driven by the fall of Qaddafi and the opening up of the Libyan route to Europe, has resulted in a flourishing domestic industry facilitating migration flows. This development has not remained unnoticed. European Union (EU) policy makers have turned their focus to the Sahel and Sahara to stem migration to Europe. In the process, a picture is often painted of the desert as an ungoverned space exploited by human smugglers that roam around freely.

The relation between irregular migration and Niger's larger social and political fabric has largely remained underexposed in this narrative. Rather than seeing the Sahel and Sahara as ungoverned spaces, it should be recognised that migrants pass through a diverse array of regions that each function according to different local and national political economies.⁴ Human smuggling networks are but one link in this migratory patchwork and a link that cannot be understood without reference to the broader sociopolitical context. In addition, a relationship often exists between the presence of lootable wealth, such as irregular migration profits and conflict and stability dynamics. Financial resources do not manifest in a vacuum, but feed existing power dynamics.⁵

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- 2 Irregular migration is defined here as migration undertaken by persons 'who, owing to unauthorised entry, breach of a condition of entry, or the expiry of his or her visa, lacks legal status in a transit or host country.' Malakooti, A. 2015. *Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean*, Paris, Altai Consulting and IOM, 3. Irregular migration flows are integrated by 'temporary and reversible movements' [circular migration], 'long-term migration' and 'forced migration.' Guilamoto, C.Z. and Sandron, F. 2003. *Migration et développement*, Paris, La Documentation Française.
 - 3 *OECD Interview with Mr. Guy-Michel Bolouvi*, OECD, Paris, 2008, <https://www.oecd.org/countries/niger/42097752.pdf> (accessed November 2016); Benattia, T. et al. 2015. *Irregular Migration Between West Africa, North Africa and the Mediterranean*, Paris, Altai Consulting; *Statistical Report Niger Flow Monitoring Points (FMP) 01 Nov – 30 Nov 2016*, IOM, Geneva, 2016, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3CEVcVlpFxORVdwSS02QIZ3S1E/view> (accessed December 2016).
 - 4 Davis, D. 2010. 'Irregular Armed Forces, Shifting Patterns of Commitment, and Fragmented Sovereignty in the Developing Worlds,' *Theory and Society*, 39(3), 397–413.
 - 5 Snyder, R. and Bhavnani, R. 2005. 'Diamonds, Blood, and Taxes: A Revenue-Centered Framework for Explaining Political Order', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 49(4), 563–597.

This begs the question of how irregular migration, and the migration mitigating policies advanced by the EU, affects political stability in Niger.

This case study investigates these questions as part of a larger research project focused on trans-Saharan human smuggling networks and their implications for political stability and conflict in the region. The contribution of the Nigerien case is twofold. Firstly, the case provides insights into what happens when historical and commonly accepted practices become the focal point of international mitigation policies overnight—and the disruptive effect that such a shift in normative acceptance may have on local livelihood strategies and precarious power equilibriums. No other country in the region currently experiences such international scrutiny as Niger, which has come to be regarded as the best bet for international policy makers targeting irregular migration.

Secondly, the strong and historical involvement of Nigerien public officials in human smuggling networks poses important questions as to the state's willingness and ability to address human smuggling networks. The relationship between state and nonstate actors encompasses a broad spectrum of strategies, ranging from national political elites that protect the interests of influential businessmen involved in the smuggling industry, to security forces that use the profits obtained through road block tolls and the provision of protection to invest in their own maintenance, to local political elites that see migrants as yet another source of income they can tax to supplement their budgets. Given these tight relationships, it seems unlikely that these state actors have similarly rejected the daily practice of migrant smuggling.⁶

The study is structured as follows. The first section first presents a historic overview of Niger as a migrant origin and transit country as well the national and EU policies targeting irregular migration. Understanding that we are currently witnessing a change in the normative appreciation of migration, rather than in migration practices *per se*, is crucial to approaching migration in a conflict-sensitive manner. Following sections discuss current EU policies targeting Niger as well as various legs of the trans-Nigerien migratory route. Each leg functions according to different dynamics, depending on the key actors involved in the facilitation of migration and their direct and indirect linkages to state officials and security forces. Niger contains different irregular migration economies and each poses their own consequences for stability. The conclusion discusses the implications of these internal dynamics for EU policies.

6 This report builds on reviews of existing academic and policy-based literature on Niger, as well as consultations with noted scholars. In addition, a systematic review of online Nigerien newspapers served to identify relevant sociopolitical incidents. Seven days of fieldwork in Niamey in August 2016 provided additional data for this report in the form of 12 extended interviews with relevant members of the international community, domestic experts, journalists, civil society groups and migrants. Given the nature of the subject, all these interviews were carried out under strict conditions of anonymity.

1 Irregular migration and human smuggling in Niger

Historical practices

Migration from, to and through Niger is an age-old phenomenon that can only be understood with a view to the tightly interwoven geographic, cultural and economic patchwork that constitutes the larger Sahel and Sahara region. Postcolonial borders did not only allocate parts of this region to independent states, such as Mali, Niger, Libya, Chad and Sudan, but also cut through tribes, clans and ethnic groups. In the case of Niger, these groups constituted a minority in the newly created state, and a disadvantaged political and economic minority at that due to their location on the desert's fringes. The newly independent government generally paid little attention to the social and economic development of the north and the communities residing there.⁷

To deal with the region's climatic challenges, such as variations in rainfall, cyclical drought and growing desertification, the pastoral and sedentary communities in the Sahara and Sahel developed various coping strategies. Internal and crossborder migration between communities across the region served to dampen the harshest shocks to people's livelihoods.⁸ This was the case in particular for Niger, which 'long depended on neighbouring economies as a source of employment,' as a result of which 'all of its neighbours house significant populations from the Nigerien diaspora.'⁹ Concomitantly, the existence of ethnic and kinship networks across the region contributed to the development of trade networks that provided people with economic opportunities. Connectivity formed—and continues to form—the guiding principle of trans-Saharan exchanges, meaning that ethnic and kinship ties rather than physical

7 Reitano, T. and Shaw, M. 2015. *Fixing a Fractured State? Breaking the Cycles of Crime, Conflict and Corruption in Mali and Sahel*, Geneva, The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, vi.

8 Tinti, P. and Reitano, T. 2016. *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour*, London, Hurst, 149; Brachet, J. 2012. 'Movements of People and Goods: Local Impacts and Dynamics of Migration to and through the Central Sahara,' in: *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa*, eds. Scheele, J. and McDougall, J. Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 238–256.

9 Tinti, P. and Reitano, T. *Op. cit.*, 155.

proximity bind trade networks together.¹⁰ Initially developed around long-distance trade, these networks increasingly turned to the smuggle of subsidised goods from north Africa and of illicit commodities such as counterfeit cigarettes and goods, arms and drugs as well.¹¹

The economic significance of these crossborder trade and smuggling networks grew to such an extent that 'there are [currently] no alternative sources of income and employment that could rival those of contraband and drug smuggling.'¹² The Tuareg and Tebu tribes are two important lynchpins in these trans-Saharan networks. The Tuareg constitute 10 percent of the Nigerien population and are predominantly concentrated in the sparsely populated and impoverished northern region of country surrounding Arlit and Agadez. Their ties extend to neighbouring countries such as Libya, Algeria and Mali. The Tebu constitute a mere 0.4 percent of population and are located in desert areas of northeast Niger. Their tribal ties extend to Libya, Chad and Sudan.¹³ Due to their geographical spread, combined with the active forging of political agreements, the two tribes have generally not conflicted over control of the desert trade routes.¹⁴

The same cannot be said about these tribes' relationship with the Nigerien state, which has been troublesome due to their social and economic marginalisation. By the late 20th century, tribal grievances had reached a boiling point, ignited also by the military experience that many young Tuareg men obtained from the early 1970s onwards under Qadhafi's Islamic Legion, a Libyan-sponsored pan-Arabic paramilitary force. Between 1990–1995 and 2007–2009, the Nigerien governments faced two periods of Tuareg

10 Scheele, J. 2012. 'Garage or Caravanserail: Saharan connectivity in Al-Khalil, Northern Mali', in: *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa*, eds. Scheele, J. and McDougall, J. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 222–237; also see: T. Reitano and M. Shaw *op. cit.* As will be discussed in more detail below, this legacy of connectivity remains visible in present-day human smuggling networks.

11 Sandor, A. 2016. '4x4s', in: *Making Things International: Catalysts and Reactions*, ed. Salter, M. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 338–356; Brachet, J. *Op. cit.*

12 Wehrey, F. 2014. 'Introduction', in: *Perilous Desert: Insecurity in the Sahara*, eds. Wehrey, F. and Boukhars, A. Washington, DC, Carnegie, 3. Also see: Scheele, J. 2015. 'Circulations marchandes au Sahara; entre licite et illicite', *Hérodote*, 3(142), 143–162; Brachet, J. *Op. cit.* The evolution of smuggling and trafficking in the region thereby took on a staged logic of development, with each set of commodities 'providing the platform for the next stage, and each in turn more profitable.' Shaw, M. and Reitano, T. 2014. *The Political Economy of Trafficking and Trade in the Sahara: Instability and Opportunities*, Sahara Knowledge Exchange Paper, Washington, DC, World Bank, 24.

13 The main ethnicities in Niger are Hausa (53.0%), Zarma-Sonrai (21.2%), Tuareg (10.4%), Fula (9.9%), Kanuri Manga (4.4%), Tubu (0.4%), Arab (0.3%), Gourmantche (0.3%), other (0.2%). *Structure de la Population*, Institut National de la Statistique, Niamey, 2012, http://www.stat-niger.org/statistique/file/Annuaire_Statistiques/AS2007-2011STRUCTUREPOPULATION.pdf201 (accessed November 2016).

14 Tinti, P. and Reitano, T. *Op. cit.* 151; Reitano, T. and Shaw, M. *Op. cit.* As will be discussed in more detail below, this may change in the near future.

rebellion, which had a substantial Tebu component as well.¹⁵ The rebellions sprung from a desire to reach substantive goals, such as gaining more political participation for the populations in the north and—even more importantly perhaps—gaining access to the uranium profits from the mines near Arlit.¹⁶

Nevertheless, more personal elitist goals shaped the trajectory of these rebellions and of the rebel movements as well. The state's response to the 1990 rebellions consisted of peace deals that focused on military integration, regional economic development and decentralisation.¹⁷ It addressed the tribal elites' more personal goals through a strategy of coopting rebel leaders into government structures. This strategy only proved effective, however, as long as it served all militant leaders' interests. It could not prevent future intraelite and intergenerational conflict within the Tuareg community that resulted eventually in the outbreak of a second rebellion between 2007 and 2009.¹⁸ The solution to this rebellion proved even more pragmatic, as the government bought off the militants and once again coopted rebel leaders through state appointments.¹⁹

As shown in Box 1 below, the north has thereby come under the control of authorities that are either involved in drug, weapons and other types of illicit trade, or turn a blind eye to such practices to preserve stability.²⁰ To date, central state authorities continue to invest in cooptative relationships with these leaders, as the fall of Qadhafi in 2011, the rapid outbreak of rebellion in Mali in 2012, terrorist attacks carried out by armed Islamist groups near the Malian and Algerian borders as well as by Boko Haram in the south and east (mainly the Diffa region) all ensure that maintenance of internal security remains the government's core priority. Keeping tribal elites close has proven crucial to this end.²¹ At the same time, the trans-Saharan trade infrastructure that these tribal elites are part of forms the foundation of the extensive human smuggling efforts that appeared over the course of the last decades and that intensified with the fall of

15 Also, after the fall of Qadhafi in 2011, the Nigerien state saw itself confronted by scores of experienced Tuareg militias returning home. Guichaoua, Y. 2014. *Transformations of Armed Violence in the Sahara*, Sahara Knowledge Exchange, Washington, DC, World Bank, 8–9.

16 The second rebellion occurred at a time when the president was renegotiating mining contracts and selling licenses to mining.

17 Guichaoua, Y. *Op. cit.*, 9.

18 Guichaoua, Y. 2009. *Circumstantial Alliances and Loose Loyalties in Rebellion Making: The Case of Tuareg Insurgency in Northern Niger (2007-2009)*, MICROCON Research Working Paper 20, Brighton, MICROCON, 13; Deycard, F. 2011. 'Les rebellions touaregues du Niger: Combattants, mobilisations et culture politique', PhD diss., Université de Bordeaux, January, 352.

19 Guichaoua, Y. 2014. *Op. cit.*, 9.

20 Lacher, W. 2013. 'Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region', in: *Perilous Desert: Insecurity in the Sahara*, eds. Wehrey, F. and Boukhars, A. Washington, DC, Carnegie, 71.

21 Guichaoua, Y. 2009. *Op. cit.*; *Id.*, 2014. *Op. cit.*; Deycard, F. *Op. cit.*; Baudais, V. and Chauzal, G. 2011. 'Briefing: The 2010 Coup D'État in Niger: A Praetorian Regulation of Politics', *African Affairs*, 110(439), 295–304.

Qadhafi in 2011. Human smuggling has become particularly relevant in the trafficking industry, as its profits now exceed those of narcotics and weapons smuggling by far, turning smuggling proceeds not only into an important economic but likely an important political tool as well.²²

Box 1 Political cooptation of the Tuareg leadership

In the 1980s, Rhissa ag Boula started his career in the crossborder trade as a pioneering desert tour operator. He went on to become an important face of the two main Nigerien Tuareg rebellions in the 1990s and of 2007–2009, as well as one of the main recipients of the spoils of the peace agreements that followed these rebellions. After the 1990–1995 rebellion, Rhissa ag Boula was promoted to Minister of Tourism, which provided him with access to two fundamental resource-generating activities. Next to control over tourism, this position in effect allowed him to control (il)licit crossborder trade.²³ His second-in-command, Aghaly Alambo, obtained the position of *sous-préfet* in Arlit, which is a position in the central state administrative structure overseeing the newly elected decentralised municipal councils. He went on to become a prosperous travel agent through the establishment of his own travel agency 'Tuareg Tours'.²⁴

After the rebellion, a rift occurred between the two rebel leaders/traffickers as Rhissa ag Boula used his position as Minister of Tourism to police the underground trade and smuggling economy near the Algerian border to his own benefit. The rift contributed to the fragmented dynamic of the next Tuareg rebellion, which was set off by a 2007 attack on a military post in northern Niger by Aghaly Alambo's brother Boubacar, an ex-combatant and diehard trafficker. Aghaly Alambo himself became the head of the subsequently formed *Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice* (MNJ).²⁵ The MNJ's primary goals consisted of '[o]btaining the promised financial assistance [from the previous accords] and getting secure positions and promotions in security forces—preferably in a military body mostly composed of Tuaregs—to permit the control of the vast northern territory and its lucrative crossborder business'.²⁶ Rhissa ag Boula responded by creating a dissident Tuareg front, the *Front des Forces de Redressement* (FFR), to reaffirm his leadership position in the north.²⁷

22 Tinti, P. and Reitano, T. *Op. cit.*, 148.

23 Guichaoua, Y. 2009. *Op. cit.*, 11-12.

24 *Ibid.*; Deycard, F. *Op.cit.*, 355.

25 Guichaoua, Y. 2009, *Op. cit.*; Deycard, F. *Op. cit.*, 346.

26 Guichaoua, Y. 2009, *Op. cit.*, 13-14.

27 *Ibid.*

By the end of the rebellion, Aghaly Alambo was dismissed as the MNJ's leader due to complaints that he was 'taking unilateral decisions on the MNJ's behalf based on his personal interests.'²⁸ Rhissa ag Boula's FFR joined the Libyan sponsored peace process, where the rebels negotiated a general amnesty for all crimes committed during the insurgency. He returned to Niger in 2010, where he was arrested for his involvement in a 2004 political murder. He was released from prison to Libya under pressure from Qadhafi. After the fall of Qadhafi, Rhissa ag Boula moved back to Niger, where he was elected Regional Councilor of Agadez in 2011.²⁹ This is the highest decentralised government office, providing him with a final say in matters such as tourism, transportation and the management of police forces.

When looking beyond these leaders' involvement in the Tuareg rebellions, however, it becomes clear that both Tuareg leaders have generally been able to work together with the central governing elites on a quite ongoing basis. In 1990, for example, Rhissa ag Boula founded the Tuareg party *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS), which participated in all governing coalitions throughout the 1990s. A rift of sorts appears to have occurred under the presidency of Mamoudou Tandja (1999–2010), when Rhissa ag Boula was jailed on accusations of having orchestrated the kidnapping and murder of a governing party official.³⁰ After the 2010 military coup and the subsequent election of Mahamadou Issoufou in 2011, both Rhissa ag Boula and Aghaly Alambo were appointed advisors to President Issoufou in what was allegedly 'a conciliatory ploy to end the cycle of Tuareg rebellions.'³¹ Rhissa ag Boula headed the governing party's candidate list in the Agadez region for the 2016 National Assembly elections. After the elections, the president appointed him as a Minister to the presidency.

Despite its contribution to short-term stability, this cooptation strategy creates substantial conflict risks in the long term. Current developments in the region show that the groups that control the human smuggling trade have been empowered by the increase in smuggling proceeds. This is especially the case for the Tebu, which control the Libyan border crossing and the territory surrounding the smuggling route to Sebha. In Agadez, Tebu smugglers' wealth and swagger have heightened tensions with the

28 US Embassy Cable, 2009, 'Niger: Northern Rebel Group Dismisses Leader', 09NIAEMEY641, 16 September.

29 Idrissa, A. and Decalo, S. *Op. cit.*

30 Keenan, J. 2006. 'Security and Insecurity in North Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 33(108), 269–296.

31 Idrissa, A. and Decalo, S. *Op. cit.*, 33.

Tuareg.³² At the same time, both tribes also experience internal frictions between their traditional leaderships and up-and-coming younger generations that have returned from Libya to Niger on the tails of the human smuggling industry and that feel that their power on the ground is not reflected in the voice they have within their tribes.³³ Combined with recent reports of weapons being smuggled back from Libya into Niger,³⁴ these developments indicate that conflict fuelled by migratory proceeds is not an unlikely scenario.

Contemporary migration mitigating measures

Despite the Nigerien government's political cooptation of former rebel leaders with strong ties to the trafficking and smuggling industry, irregular migration has come under increased scrutiny from national law makers and international policy makers alike. In the aftermath of the EU-Turkey deal, which shut down boat journeys across the Aegean Sea, it has become painstakingly clear that the Central Mediterranean migration route continues to function unhindered. Boat departures from Libya have been on the rise since the fall of Qadhafi in 2011, and the migratory flows streaming into Italy are unlikely to abate in the near future. Frequent media reports of drowned migrants washing up on Libya's shores drive an international effort to 'do something.' Combined with the EU's increasingly intolerant domestic climate towards migrants, this has fuelled a push to contain migration in origin regions. Trans-Saharan irregular migration, which connects West Africa to North Africa and Europe through Niger, has thereby become the latest target of EU foreign policy aimed at stemming irregular migration flows.

To address the issue of irregular migration, the EU has adopted a complex and multifaceted response, now loosely organised under the 2015 European Agenda on Migration.³⁵ The EU builds on the 2015 Valletta Agreement, which brought 'the EU and African countries together to work in a spirit of partnership and find common solutions to mutual challenges,' to implement the Agenda in Niger. Under the Valetta Agreement, the EU and African countries collaborate in areas such as addressing the root causes of

32 *Ibid.*

33 Personal communication, military expert, 2016. The Hague, The Netherlands, 16 September.

Personal communication, Sahel expert, 2016. The Hague, The Netherlands, 11 December.

34 Personal communication, conflict mediator working north Niger, 2016. The Hague, The Netherlands, 14 September.

35 *European Agenda on Migration – Factsheets*, European Commission, Brussels, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/index_en.htm (accessed November 2016).

migration, tackling smuggling networks and improving return and readmission.³⁶ In June 2016, the EU launched the additional Partnership Framework to mobilise and focus EU actions in the region even further.³⁷ One final thing to note is that the Valletta Agreement resulted in the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015–2020), which addresses the root causes of migration with a focus on ‘support on *border management*, youth and employment, mobility.’³⁸ In line with this focus on border management as a key tool to address irregular migration, some of the most visible programs developed under the Valletta Agreement are securitised measures, such as the one supporting the Nigerien authorities in preventing irregular migration and combatting associated crimes (EUCAP SAHEL Niger mission).³⁹

In the case of Niger, the concerted EU pressure to address irregular migration and human smuggling has resulted in the adoption of a 2015 law on the smuggling of migrants.⁴⁰ Added to the existing Ordinance on the Entry and Stay of Foreigners and the 2010 Ordinance on Combating Trafficking in Persons (2010-86), this new law increases prison sentences and monetary fines for traffickers and allows for the seizure of their vehicles. On paper, the law is drafted in a strong and concise manner and targets facilitators of irregular migration, such as bus companies that transport undocumented migrants, and bribery. In June 2016, with the support of the European Union through the Migration EU eXpertise Initiative (MIEUX) implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the Nigerien authorities also started elaborating a National Strategy to Counter Irregular Migration which aims to provide a comprehensive response to irregular migration. The Strategy relies on

36 *2015 Valletta Summit on Migration – Background on EU Action*, European Council, Brussels, 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/11/11-valletta-summit-press-pack/> (accessed November 2016).

37 Under this framework, the EU agrees on tailored ‘compacts’ with third countries, such as Niger, that outline ‘financial support and development and neighbourhood policy tools [that] will reinforce local capacity-building, including for border control, asylum procedures, counter-smuggling and reintegration efforts.’ *Commission Announces New Migration Partnership Framework: Reinforced Cooperation with Third Countries to Better Manage Migration*, Brussels, European Commission press release, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-2072_en.htm (accessed November 2016).

38 *EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling (2015–2020)*, European Council, Brussels, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/policies/asylum/general/docs/eu_action_plan_against_migrant_smuggling_en.pdf (accessed November 2016).

39 *2015 Valletta Summit on Migration – Background on EU Action*, *op. cit.*

40 Loi 2015-36, 26/05/2015, relative au trafic illicite de migrants. Adoption of this law was also driven by domestic factors, such as the heavily publicised discovery of 92 bodies, almost all of which were women and children, in the desert near Algeria in 2013. Personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August. Also see: Hirsch, A. 2013. ‘Niger Migrants Died from Thirst, After Stranding in Sahara Desert’, *The Guardian*, 31 October, World section; Mann, C. 2016. ‘A Migrant’s Harrowing Tale about Life in Libya’, *The World Post*, 14 September.

four interconnected axes which are: border management, prevention, investigation, prosecution and protection and return and reintegration.⁴¹

To date, these laws and initiatives have been unable to stop large migratory flows passing through Niger. This is not to say that the authorities have made no attempts at all to stop irregular migration and human smuggling. Since the adoption of the law, police forces have started rounding up human smugglers and ghetto leaders, resulting in the arrest of 47 individuals and the impounding of 67 vehicles.⁴² According to one civil society organisation, however, such actions are all for show as 'the government sometimes pretends to care for the international community, but it is really not its main concern. Pretending to care allows the government to continue receiving money from the EU.'⁴³ Such disciplinary efforts may even form a way for newly posted public officials to extract their share of smuggling profits.⁴⁴

In any case, the continuation of migratory flows on the ground shows that these government efforts have been unable to stem irregular migration.⁴⁵ They only contribute to the increased professionalisation of criminal networks, more dangerous routes and higher smuggling fees and bribes.⁴⁶ According to a recent report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Nigerien delegation, this is the case in Niger as well, as their 'research on smuggling indicates that measures restricting routes seem to make migration routes more dangerous in the short term as smugglers and migrants take longer roads to circumvent security checks.'⁴⁷ The following sections look at the different migratory dynamics within Niger, as well as their relation to the larger political economy, in order to discuss the stability implications of these current policy approaches in more detail.

41 The Strategy was finalised in December 2016 and needs to be validated over the course of 2017 before it can be implemented.

42 Personal communication, Agadez migration expert, 2016. the Hague, The Netherlands, 1 November. Personal interview, president of a local migrant NGO, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August. Also see: RFI. 2015. 'Niger. Une loi pour lutter contre le trafic de migrants', *RFI Afrique*, 1 July; Lewis, D. *Op. cit.*

43 Personal interview, president of a local NGO, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 6 August.

44 Personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August.

45 Also see: Flynn, D. 2015. 'African Migrants Risk All in Sahara to Reach Europe', *Reuters*, 28 May, World News section.

46 Personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August; also see: Raineri, L. 2016. 'La geopolitica delle migrazioni africane verso l'Italia', *La Rivista del Mulino*, March.

47 *DTM Niger Flow Monitoring – Statistical Report (1 October – 31 October 2016)*, IOM, Niamey, 2016, <http://www.globaldtm.info/dtm-niger-flow-monitoring-statistical-report-1-october-31-october-2016/> (accessed November 2016).

2 The legal route from West Africa to Agadez

In the present day and age, Niger constitutes both a transit and origin country for migration.⁴⁸ Migrants from Ghana, Togo and Benin enter Niger by crossing the border with Benin at Gaya. Alternatively, these migrants join Nigerian and Cameroonian migrants in Nigeria, where migrants cross into Niger at various points along the 1,497-km border. West Africans departing from countries such as Senegal, Gambia, Mali, the Guineas, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast enter Niger through Burkina Faso (see Figure 1 below). Relevant root causes that these migrants self-report are the lack of economic opportunities (88–93 percent), a lack of access to services (2–6 percent), and war, conflict and insecurity (2–3 percent).⁴⁹ Within Niger itself, domestic economic migrants join these flows. This phenomenon is related to the highly agricultural nature of the Nigerian economy, as an estimated 90 percent of the population works in agriculture.⁵⁰ Historically, it has been common practice for agricultural workers to migrate to neighbouring countries during the dry season and then return home for either the harvest or rainy season.⁵¹ In recent years, these patterns have been affected by an increase in the lean season (when there is little to no harvest) and by irregular rains affecting the agricultural sectors. These changes have increased Nigerien migrants' dependence on circular migration for their livelihoods.⁵²

48 To a lesser degree, Niger is also a destination country. Migrants from Chad and Sudan, and from Niger itself, head to the northern mineral mines to work on these sites. These streams pass through Agadez and mix in with the irregular migration flow here. *Statistical Report – Niger Flow Monitoring Points 26 July 2016 – 08 August 2016*, IOM, Geneva, 2016, <http://www.globaldtm.info/dtm-niger-flow-monitoring-weekly-statistical-report-26-july-8-august-2016/> (accessed November 2016); *500 KM dans le Sahara: Mission exploratoire des routes migratoires du nord est du Niger*, 2016, Geneva, IOM; Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*

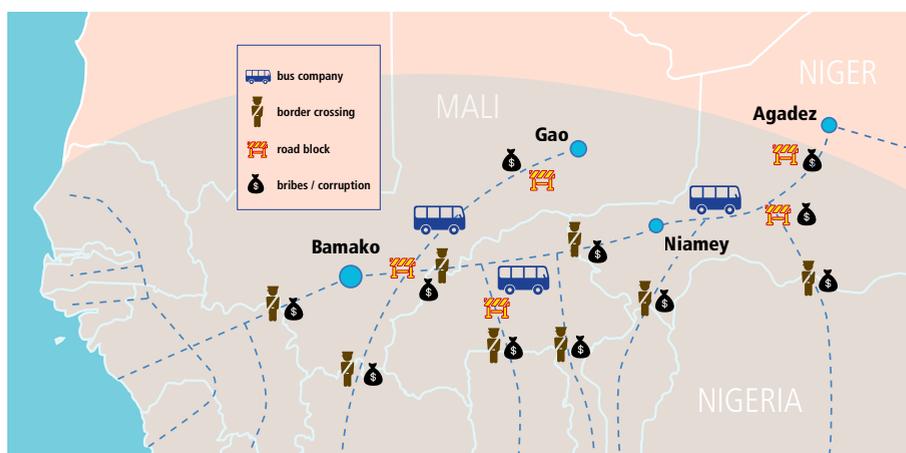
49 *Flow Monitoring Points – Niger February–June 2016*, IOM DTM, Geneva, 2016, <http://www.globaldtm.info/dtm-niger-flow-monitoring-information-sheets-february-june-2016/> (accessed November 2016).

50 *CIA World Factbook – Niger*, CIA, Washington, 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ng.html> (accessed November 2016).

51 Benattia, T. et al. *Op. cit.*, 25; Brachet, J. *Op. cit.*; Devillard, A., Bacchi, A. and Noack, M. 2015. *A Survey on Migration Policies in West Africa*, Vienna, ICMPD, 28; White, C. 1997. 'The Effect of Poverty on Risk Reduction Strategies of Fulani Nomads in Niger' *Nomadic Peoples*, 1(1), 91; *OECD Interview with Mr. Guy-Michel Bolouvi*, OECD, Paris, 2008, <https://www.oecd.org/countries/niger/42097752.pdf> (accessed November 2016).

52 Benattia, T. et al., *op. cit.* A 2016 IOM report notes that in some Nigerien communities such circular economic migration to Libya is even seen as a necessary rite of passage before starting a family. This anecdotal evidence suggests that a gendered dynamic may be at work in the root causes for Nigerien migration as well, as economic migrants may also be driven by broader familial concerns. See: IOM, *op. cit.*

Figure 1 The legal route



In theory, many migrants can enter Niger legally, because they are nationals of countries that belong to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which maintains a free-movement protocol.⁵³ In practice, many migrants travel without (being able to produce) valid documentation.⁵⁴ The transnational bus companies that service the routes between the origin countries and Niger handle the grey zone between regular and irregular travel quite skilfully.⁵⁵ Firstly, a clear irregular dynamic is visible at the border crossing between Burkina Faso and Niger. According to eyewitness accounts, bus companies have developed a system to work with border controls while still being able to transport undocumented migrants. They do so by stopping before the border and unloading any undocumented migrants that might be traveling on board. These migrants are pointed to irregular taxi services that help them cross the border along uncontrolled points. They are met on the other side of the border by the same bus, which waits for its

53 The ECOWAS member countries are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo.

54 Seasonal workers, interregional traders and herders have traditionally been used to passing borders without sticking to official border crossings, while migrants may hide their documents out of fear that they will lose them if they present these to the authorities and/or are unaware of their legal rights under the ECOWAS protocol. Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*; Benattia, T. et al. *Op. cit.*

55 Depending on their country of origin, ECOWAS migrants pay between 50 and 100 Euros to reach Agadez or Gao in a safe and comfortable manner, that is, on a direct, air-conditioned bus from the main origin countries' capitals.

irregular passengers to board again before it continues its journey.⁵⁶ In some instances, bus companies even designate totally separate services for migrants, allowing other passengers to travel without this hassle.⁵⁷

Secondly, migrants do not only pay for their bus ticket. Eyewitness accounts relate that bus companies pass at least three police checkpoints between the border with Burkina Faso and the capital of Niamey and more checkpoints on the road between Niamey and Agadez. These checkpoints were instituted because of the threat of radical extremism and terrorism in the region. They also allow police and other security officials to toll undocumented migrants before being allowed to continue on their journey. Migrants reportedly pay 43.000 CFA (65 EUR) to pass the checkpoints between Niamey and Agadez, with undocumented migrants allegedly paying 86.000 CFA (130 EUR).⁵⁸ To speed up the process, it has become common practice for bus drivers to collect the necessary funds from migrants beforehand and to distribute these to the police at each checkpoint.⁵⁹ This is indicative of the institutionalisation of police corruption, both in terms of the regularity of the interactions between bus drivers and police officials and the apparent stability of the fees that are levied at these checkpoints.

At the national level, an even more collusive relationship between the national government, organised trafficking groups and the bus company owners exists. Box 2 and Figure 2 provide a network analysis of two of the main players on the international bus transportation market to outline the intricate nature of these relationships.

56 Personal interview, president of a local migrant NGO, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August. The government's adoption of the 2015 law against the illicit smuggling of migrants, which contains a specific passage targeting bus companies' transport of undocumented migrants, indirectly confirms the widespread occurrence of these practices.

57 Personal communication, Sahel migration expert, 2016. The Hague, The Netherlands, 11 December.

58 Personal interview, local migration expert, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August; Personal interview, president of a local migrant NGO, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August; Lewis, D. 2014. 'Special Report: Despite Deaths, Crackdown, Sahara Migrant Trail Thrives', *Reuters*, 15 May, Politics Special Reports section.

59 Personal interview, local migration expert, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August; Personal interview, president of a local migrant NGO, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August.

Box 2 Chérif Cocaine and Rimbo

The case of Elhadj Chérif Ould Abidine, better known as Chérif Cocaine, illustrates how linkages may form between transport company owners with criminal ties and political elites. As his moniker suggests, Chérif Ould Abidine was a kingpin in the trans-Saharan cocaine trade. He was also the owner of the Nigerien transnational bus company 3STV.⁶⁰ Before his death in February 2016, Chérif Ould Abidine sat on the National Council for the Restoration of Democracy (2010, a response to the military coup that same year), held a seat in the National Assembly (2011–2012), headed the Agadez list for the 2016 National Assembly elections and occupied the presidency of the governing PNDS-Tarayya party's Agadez chapter.⁶¹ President Issoufou and many other dignitaries attended his funeral.⁶²

Rimbo Transport Voyageurs stands out as the international bus company with the most developed network of routes in the ECOWAS region. Rimbo's owner Mohamed Rhissa Ali, a Tuareg businessman, started the Nigerien company as a primarily import/export-based enterprise in 1999. The company's prominence in the international bus trade is a remarkable feat, given that it is a relatively young player on the passenger transport market.⁶³ Its expansion is indicative of the amount of money that can be made in the borderline-licit trans-Saharan transport industry. Perhaps coincidentally, this expansion also took place during the last Tuareg rebellion (2007–2009). While increased insecurity and the drop in travel this caused in the region hit several other large Nigerien bus companies hard, Rimbo opened offices in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Togo.⁶⁴

60 Raineri, L. 2016. 'In Niger le guardie sono ladri e cogestiscono le migrazioni', *Limes*, July; personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August; personal interview, local migration expert, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August.

61 Maina, A. 2010. 'Nominations de conseillers spéciaux et techniques à la présidence du CSRD', *Adammaina.blogspot*, 31 March, <http://adammaina.blogspot.nl/2010/03/nominations-de-conseillers-speciaux-et.html> (accessed November 2016); Blary, M. 2015. 'Niger: Issoufou soutenu par un trafiquant et un ex-rebelle touareg', *Mondafrique*, 5 November, Politics section.

62 Tamtaminfo. 2016. 'Décès, à Agadez, de M. Chérif Ould Abidine, ancien député et candidat aux législatives: Le Président Issoufou Mahamadou et plusieurs hautes personnalités ont assisté à levée du corps du disparu', *Tamtaminfo*, 18 February.

63 Idrissa, A. and Decalo, S. 2012. *Op. cit.*, 443; Aksar, M. 2016. 'Mohamed Rissa Ali dit "Rimbo", roi de l'autobus nigérien dans Panama Papers', *Panama Papers*, blog post, <https://panamapapers.investigativecenters.org/niger-2/> (accessed November 2016).

64 Aksar, M. *Op. cit.*; Soumana Rabiadou, S. 2010. 'Stratégies d'entreprises de transport routier interurbain des voyageurs en Afrique de l'Ouest: case du Niger', PhD diss., Université Lumière Lyon, March.

Rimbo's owner has used his fortune to forge political ties that proved collusive at times. He is a high-ranked member of the governing PNDP-Tarayya party and is considered to be one of the President's main financial donors.⁶⁵ These connections have proven useful as Rhissa Ali's financial affairs started making headlines over the last years. In 2015, he was caught while trying to leave the country with 10 billion CFA (15 million EUR) in foreign currency stuffed in several suitcases.⁶⁶ The Minister of Finance subsequently ordered the release of both Rhissa Ali and the money as he explained it to be common practice for businessmen of this stature to travel with large amounts of cash.⁶⁷ His name also appeared in the Panama papers, but his large offshore holdings did not generate an official investigation on the count of the Nigerien authorities—or any domestic media attention for that matter.⁶⁸

The fact that national authorities both consist of—and collude with—these powerful businessmen is indicative of a larger pattern of the subversion of the rule of law in the face of a powerful consortium of business and political elites. As a consequence of the funding of Nigerien politics through trafficking money, it is also believed that organised criminal interests influence the government, such as by setting the parameters for certain security initiatives.⁶⁹ This clearly complicates efforts to target this semi-legal side of irregular migration through state-sponsored initiatives. Indeed, although the 2015 Nigerien Law related to irregular migrant smuggling contains an entire chapter dedicated to the transport companies' servicing of undocumented migrants, no investigations have been opened into the bus companies' facilitation of irregular migration.⁷⁰

65 Personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August; La redaction de Mondafrique. 2015. 'Deux trafiquants proches du président nigérien arrêtés à l'aéroport de Niamey', *Mondafrique*, 10 September, Economics section

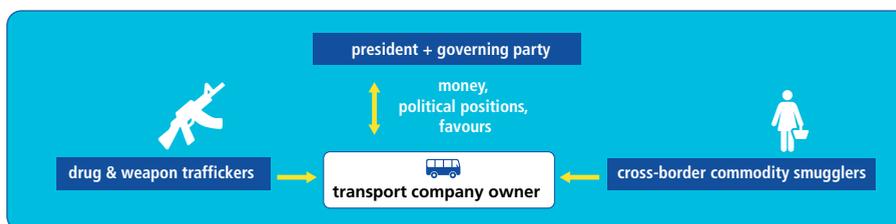
66 La redaction de Mondafrique. 2015. 'Deux trafiquants proches du président nigérien arrêtés à l'aéroport de Niamey', *Mondafrique*, 10 September, Economics section

67 ANiamey. 2016. 'Trafic de devises et d'or à l'aéroport international Diori Hamani de Niamey: Ces fuites massives de capitaux ne sont-elles pas à l'origine des déboires financiers actuels d l'État?', *ANiamey*, 24 June, Society section.

68 Aksar, M. *Op. cit.*; personal interview, local migration expert, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August.

69 Reitano, T. and Shaw, M. *Op. cit.*, 40.

70 Loi No. 2015-36 du 26 mai 2015 relative au trafic illicite de migrants. Personal interview, local migration expert, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August.

Figure 2 The legal route's political dynamics

These financial relationships are also indicative of a larger pattern of governance issues. In the long run, the use of personal support networks and particularistic interests to become elected to parliament has been found to result in a dynamic called unanimism. Under unanimism, consensus appears as the key norm of governance, as representatives rely on informal networks with the executive to obtain the resources needed to satisfy their support bases' demands. In the process, dissidence forms a sure-fire way to become cut off from executive spoils and is basically an act of political suicide. This consensus logic ultimately undermines the ability of elected officials to 'scrutinize matters of national interest' and hollows out the state from within.⁷¹ In neighboring Mali, for example, unanimism contributed to rising levels of popular discontent that politicians failed to accommodate within the formal political process, ultimately resulting in the 2012 coup.⁷²

In the case of Niger, genuine democratic opposition parties have already disappeared due to the government's reliance on day-to-day corruption, patronage and nepotism to build governing coalitions.⁷³ Although the financial proceeds introduced in political life at the behest of the bus company owners facilitating irregular migration constitute only part of these dynamics, they are indicative of a larger pattern of the corruption of public authority by particularistic interests. These practices can only be rooted out through a more general focus on issues of good governance and the funding of politics and elections. Targeting such issues should depart from more systematic efforts to track the loops connecting criminal activities with preexisting routes of patronage and influence trafficking. At the same time, such efforts would require a shift away from development policies aimed at border control and countering human smuggling towards more long-term institution building efforts.

71 Van Vliet, M. 2014. 'Weak Legislatures, Failing MPs, and the Collapse of Democracy in Mali', *African Affairs*, 113(450), 45.

72 *Ibid.*

73 *Ibid.*; Van Damme, T. 2016. *Under the Shadow of Boko Haram: Niger on the Eve of Elections*, CRU commentary, The Hague, the Clingendael Institute.

3 Agadez: a migrant smuggling hub

Upon entering Agadez, the migration dynamic starts to change, as no more legal means of transportation are available to serve migrants' onward journeys. In addition, the challenges associated with traversing the vast and dangerous 'Saharan sea' are such that migrants generally do not undertake this trek on their own. Instead, they turn to human smuggling networks to facilitate this journey for them. In general, the human smuggling networks that operate in Agadez are headed by a *passeur* who coordinates the migrants' overall journey. The *passeurs* employ several local *cokseurs*, who are responsible for the recruitment of migrants and/or who meet migrants once they arrive in Agadez to further guide them along their way. The migrants are brought to the localities of 'ghetto bosses,' who provide lodgings in transit hubs such as Agadez.⁷⁴ From these localities on, migrants are either put on a 'double cabin Hilux,' a common reference to a 4x4 terrain wagon, or on a larger freight truck also transporting other goods and wares. The drivers that operate them tend to be youngsters that used to work in the tourist industry and that are familiar with navigating the desert.⁷⁵

When compared to accounts of migrant smuggling in the early 2000s, the basic dynamics of Nigerien human smuggling networks and practices appear to have remained relatively stable over time.⁷⁶ This underlines once again that human smuggling is not a novel phenomenon, but something that has become deeply rooted in the political economy of north Niger. One recent trend signalled by several respondents is, however, that an increasing number of migrants have already been put into contact with a ghetto boss in Agadez before they enter Niger and/or get on the bus to travel between Niamey and Agadez. In practice, this means that many migrants now pay 30–50 percent of their journey in their country of origin and the rest of the journey upon arrival. They

74 Oftentimes, the figure of *passeur* and ghetto boss is the same.

75 The freight trucks generally travel to the gold mines north of Agadez. Personal interview, former migrant, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August; personal interview, former migrant, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August; personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August. Also see: Kingsley, P. 2016. *The New Odyssey: The Story of Europe's Refugee Crisis*, London, Guardian Books.

76 Brachet, J. 2005. 'Constructions of Territoriality in the Sahara: The Transformation of Spaces of Transit', *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 8(5), 237–253. Also see: Monzini, P. 2010. *Smuggling of Migrants Into, Through, and From North Africa*, New York, UNODC.

are provided with the names of *cokseurs* on every stop along the way, who put them into contact with the local ghetto bosses and drivers.⁷⁷

The increased relevance of such package deals is likely explained by the increased competitiveness of the human smuggling industry. Migrants recount, for example, that before the outbreak of the Libyan conflict in 2011, they used to pay 120,000 CFA (182 EUR). According to several sources, these prices have risen since to levels up to 150,000 CFA (230 EUR).⁷⁸ Respondents argue that this rise in prices is a direct consequence of the increased government efforts to tackle migration, which has driven up the bribes that smugglers need to pay to security officials and has led smugglers to take more dangerous routes.⁷⁹ Prices may go down again, however, as smuggling has become more competitive.⁸⁰ Indeed, and given the amount of profits to be made in smuggling, the number of smuggling outfits has risen from 12 so-called ‘travel agencies’ in 2007 to 70 reported smugglers’ ghettos in 2013.⁸¹ News items on human smugglers in Agadez similarly capture this competition in the form of scores of *cokseurs* descending upon newly arrived migrants at the local bus terminals.⁸²

The package deals also illustrate how Agadez’s smuggling networks are generally connected to larger networks that operate an entire smuggling route. This development is facilitated by the fact that human smuggling networks are generally organized along ethnolinguistic lines.⁸³ The networks’ transnational ties are reflective of the more general nature of people and trade of the Sahara, which is organised on the principle of connectivity of ethnic, clan and kinship networks.⁸⁴ In the case of Nigerian migrants,

77 IOM, *op. cit.*; personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August.

78 Kingsley, P. 2015. ‘On the Road in Agadez: Desperation and Death Along a Saharan Smuggling Route’, *The Guardian*, 9 November, Migration section; IOM, *op. cit.* This is five times the monthly minimum wage of 30,000 CFA/45 EUR. Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*

79 Tinti, P. and Reitano, T. *Op. cit.*, 177.

80 *Weekly Statistical Report – Niger Flow Monitoring Points (FMP) 24 May 2016 – 30 May 2016*, IOM, Geneva, 2016, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B_hLuy9q1oXQMzdYY3U5OXI4ZFU (accessed November 2016).

81 Compare Monzini, P. *Op. cit.* and Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*

82 See, for example, this episode of the Belgian current events program ‘Terzake’ <http://www.canvas.be/video/terzake/voorjaar-2016/dinsdag-12-juli-2016/over-agadez-ideale-plek-voor-mensensmokkelaars> (accessed November 2016).

83 Personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August; personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August. According to a 2015 Frontex study, such transnational networks tend to be composed of three to six individuals, who are either relatives or friends. Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*

84 Scheele, J. 2012. *Op. cit.*

for example, the relevant Agadez *passeur* is a Nigerian woman commonly referred to as Auntie. Respondents similarly note that migrants from Cameroon usually rely on Cameroonian *passeurs* and stay in Cameroonian-led ghettos.⁸⁵ This is not to say that Nigeriens are excluded from such operations, as foreign smugglers usually rely on the property of Nigerian vehicle and ghetto owners to run their businesses.⁸⁶

The amount of money to be made in human smuggling, an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 EUR for a single trip carrying 25–30 migrants, has created a parallel economy that attracts many young people in Agadez and in other desert towns along the smuggling route further northward. A recent IOM report estimates, for example, that some 60 percent of young people (ages 18–25) in the relay town of Dirkou work in the migrant transportation business. In response to the increases in migratory flows, younger children (ages 11–12) have reportedly dropped out of school, while men have deserted vocational training centres to work in the human smuggling business instead.

The migration industry in Agadez and other northern desert towns is not limited, however, to the activities of people directly involved in human smuggling. Indeed, transit towns in northern Niger have witnessed economic growth due to all manner of migration-related activities. Next to specialised transportation companies, this industry includes the local infrastructure of hotels, restaurants and call shops, and/or capitalises on the availability of cheap migrant labour.⁸⁷ In the case of the northern town of Séguédine, for example, the local community has become heavily dependent on selling water, food and shelter.⁸⁸ A similar developmental process is visible in Agadez, which has grown from 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants in the last five years.

Hence, not all elements of Agadez's irregular migration industry are illicit necessarily, and migration has created an important economic impulse in an underdeveloped region. Migration practices have become closely ingrained in local economies,⁸⁹ which

85 Personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August; personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August.

86 In addition, migrants plan their journey based on the information they received from friends and relatives that migrated earlier on. Migrants are also more prone to trust their fellow countrymen when traveling abroad. Personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August. The respondent noted that migrant trafficking is often also intertwined with other forms of trafficking, such as drugs, arms and cigarettes.

87 Brachet, J. *Op. cit.*, 253–254; *Analysis: Niger Flow Monitoring Surveys Feb 2016 – Mar 2016*, IOM, Geneva, 2016, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B_hLuy9q1oXQcnIxY0pQR2NldFU (accessed November 2016).

88 More traditional industries, such as harvesting salt and agriculture (dates) have been abandoned by all but women. IOM, *op. cit.*

89 Reitano, T. and Shaw, M. *Op. cit.*, 21.

were severely weakened to begin with by the increased insecurity caused by the 1991 and 2006 Tuareg rebellions and the 2011–2012 crisis in the Sahel, leading to a decline in tourism and other economic opportunities in the region.⁹⁰ Given this economic relevance, the European border management agency Frontex therefore warns that tackling the human smuggling industry could spark local protest—as occurred in Algeria when the government increased its repressive anti-smuggling efforts.⁹¹

The migration industry in Agadez and other northern desert towns thereby creates a complex dilemma for policy makers. Exacerbated by the fact that addressing migration was historically a low state priority,⁹² migration has created important economic opportunities in a region where few alternatives exist and has thereby become an integral part of the empirical manifestation of political order and stability. Some even fear that the irregular migration industry is all that prevents a new Tuareg uprising.⁹³ The reality on the ground is that migration and other types of illicit crossborder trade sustain and contribute to people's livelihoods. For decades, the Nigerien state effectively outsourced its responsibility to foresee in economic opportunities in the region to local actors engaged in these practices.⁹⁴ The question is now whether the state can address irregular migration without upsetting this precarious *status quo*.

This is not to say that policy makers should ignore human smuggling. The analysis presented above points to some of the debilitating effects that these networks and practices may have for the Nigerien state in the long run. If unaddressed, the proliferation of human smuggling networks may obstruct or deincestivise investments in more formal economic development in north Niger, it may eat away at human capital as easy smuggling profits trump educational and labour investments and it may further institutionalise a local interest structure that maintains migrants' human rights abuses and desert deaths. What is needed is a more hands-on understanding of these dynamics on the ground to form policies that root out the migration industry's negative effects while doing the least harm to local economic development and stability in the process.

90 Dambo, L. et al. 2014. 'Insecurity and Generalized Political Crises: A Challenge for Tourism Development in the Air Massif Region of Niger', *Journal of Alpine Research*, 102(1), 1–13; also see: *Rapport Statistique Hebdomadaire – Niger Points de monitoring des flux (PMF) 15 Feb 2016 – 23 Feb 2016*, IOM, Geneva, 2016, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B_hLuy9q1oXQZFN5NWtQSzRXVmM (accessed November 2016).

91 Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.* Also see: Personal interview, president of a local NGO, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 6 August; Tinti, P. and Reitano, T. *Op. cit.*, 18; Reitano, T. 2016. 'Further Criminalizing People Smuggling Will not Work', *Refugees Deeply*, op-ed posted 30 September 2016.

92 Personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August; Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*; Reitano, T. and Shaw, M. *Op. cit.*, 34.

93 Personal interview, high-ranking government official working on stability, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August.

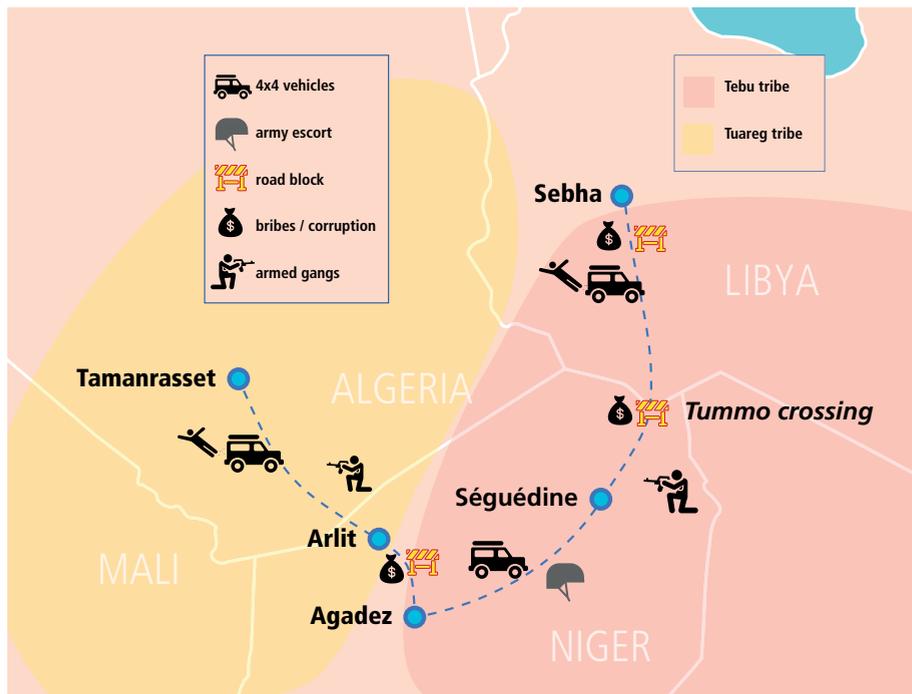
94 Shaw, M. and Reitano, T. *Op. cit.*

4 The irregular route to Algeria and Libya

The two roads northwards

After Agadez, the road forks off into two directions (see Figure 3 below). One route travels through the northwestern mining town of Arlit with the ultimate goal of reaching either the Algerian town of Tamanrasset via the Assamakka border post or the Algerian town of Djanet via the Tchibarakaten Well.⁹⁵ The second route travels through the northeastern desert town of Séguédine, passes military surveillance posts at Dao Timni and Madama, crosses the Libyan border at the Tummo border post and ultimately arrives in Sebha, Libya.

Figure 3 The coopted route



95 Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*, 27.

The development of the migration route to Algeria can be traced back to the late 1950s, when 'the gradual monetisation of the Saharan economy led to a growing need for cash, and young Nigerien Tuareg began to accompany northbound caravans in search of temporary wage labour in southern Algeria.'⁹⁶ This dynamic continued throughout periods of climatic and ecological crisis, such as the 1969–1973 droughts, when pastoral and agricultural workers went to Algeria to look for work.⁹⁷ Algeria's role as a destination country remains visible in recent migration figures for this route (see Box 3 below). In the period between February and October 2016, the IOM recorded some 28,000 migrants using the Arlit-Tamanrasset route.⁹⁸ Roughly equal numbers of migrants returned to Niger between February and October 2016 as well, underlining the mainly circular nature of migration to Algeria.⁹⁹

When traveling in the direction of Algeria, migrants can theoretically make use of the existing road network to travel from Agadez to Algeria via Arlit. Trucks travelling the route generally refuse to drive migrants without papers across the border, however, because Algerian customs officials levy a fine for this.¹⁰⁰ In addition, and following the 2013 rebellion in Mali, Algeria has closed its borders and only opens them sporadically.¹⁰¹ As a consequence, human smugglers rely on 4x4 terrain wagons to smuggle migrants across the border in secret. Migrants reportedly pay 90 EUR for the ride.¹⁰² The journey to Tamanrasset takes an average of one to two days, whereas the journey to Djanet takes three to five days. Many accounts abound of robberies and of passengers getting stuck in the desert and being left to die.¹⁰³

96 Brachet, J. 2012. *Op. cit.*, 240.

97 *Ibid.*; *Id.* 2011. *Op. cit.*, 2.

98 *DTM Niger Flow Monitoring – Statistical Report (1 October – 31 October 2016)*, IOM, Niamey, 2016, <http://www.globaldtm.info/dtm-niger-flow-monitoring-statistical-report-1-october-31-october-2016/> (accessed November 2016).

99 This is also due to Algeria's antimigrant policies and increased xenophobia and racism that migrants fall victim to. See: Mann, C. *Op. cit.*

100 Brachet, J. 2012. *Op. cit.*, 249.

101 RFI. 2015. 'Visite du président du Niger en Algérie: terrorisme et Libye au menu', *RFI Afrique*, 27 January.

102 Benattia, T. *Op. cit.*

103 Brachet, J. 2011. 'The Blind Spot of Repression: Migration Policies and Human Survival in the Sahara', in: *Transnational Migration and Human Security*, eds. Truong, T. and Gasper, D. Berlin, Springer, 7.

Box 3 Migrants' origins and destinations – the Arlit-Tamanrasset route

Origins		Destination	
Niger	38%	(North) Africa:	82%
Mali	12%	Algeria	68%
Cameroon	9%	Libya	14%
Burkina Faso	8%		
Guinea Conakry	6%		
Other	27%	Europe:	18%

Niger Flow Monitoring – Quarterly Report (Feb 2016–April 2016), IOM, Niamey, 2016, https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_hLuy9q1oXQUzdISTRPdTVwazq (accessed November 2016).

As is the case for Algeria, Libya itself has long served as a temporal migration destination for Nigerien labourers looking for jobs. This practice started in the 1960s, when 'young Tebu and Kanuri from the Kawar and Djado regions of northeastern Niger have travelled to the Fezzan in southwest Libya, where they settled in easily, helped by the Libyan Tebu community and long-standing commercial links between the two areas.'¹⁰⁴ This practice continues in the present day (see Box 4 below).¹⁰⁵

An overarching organisation of migrant transport between Agadez and Libya developed in the 1990s, when Libyan traders obtained official approval from the Nigerien government to carry passengers back to Libya on their trucks.¹⁰⁶ Around the same time, 4x4 terrain wagons started to service the route between Agadez and Libya as well.¹⁰⁷ With the increased border controls instituted by the Libyan government under Qadhafi, this latter option became an unviable one. Truck owners were no longer willing to transport migrants along with their other goods and wares to avoid arrests and/or

104 Brachet, J. 2012. *Op. cit.*, 242.

105 A 2011 report notes that Nigeria (37.8%), Libya (12.6%), Ivory Coast (12.4%), Benin (8.3%) and Ghana (7.7%) formed the main destination countries for Nigerien migrants. Cited in: Devillard, A. et al. *Op. cit.*, 243. Also see: *Statistical Report Niger Flow Monitoring Points 26 July 2016 – 08 August 2016*, IOM, Geneva, 2016, https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_hLuy9q1oXQYmhuRGZleFBjams/view (accessed November 2016).

106 Motorized transport of migrants in the region developed in the 1970s. Truckers would transport migrants along with (on top of) other goods and wares throughout the Sahel. See Brachet, J. 2012. *Op. cit.*, 243, 246.

107 Prices used to differ per type of vehicle that was used. The 4x4s were more expensive because they were faster and because they could circumvent police checkpoints along the way. Freight trucks, on the other hand, were slower and took the official route, with all the checkpoints this entailed. At the same time, these trucks were safer because migrants were less prone to the dangers of terrain wagon break down and/or being left in the desert. Personal interview, former migrant, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August.

seizure of their trucks and goods along the Libyan border.¹⁰⁸ As a consequence, migrants now rely mostly on 4x4s to cross the Sahel into Libya.¹⁰⁹ In the first nine months of 2016, the IOM recorded some 250,000 migrants traveling on the route to Sebha.¹¹⁰

Box 4 Migrants' origins and destinations – the Agadez-Sebha route

Origins		Destination	
Niger	36%	Libya: 81%	Europe: 18%
Nigeria	26%		
Senegal	12%		
The Gambia	9%		
Ivory Coast	5%		
Other	13%		

Niger Flow Monitoring – Quarterly Report (Feb 2016–April 2016), IOM, Niamey, 2016, https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_hLuy9q1oXQUzdISTRPdTVwazq (accessed November 2016).

The figures presented in Boxes 3 and 4 above show that the majority of migrants travelling out of Niger do not intend to travel to Europe. The numbers confirm what is discussed in more detail in this series' synthesis report, namely that an estimated 80 percent of migrants travelling through Niger do not set foot on a boat to Europe. Instead, their journeys form part of a larger, historical pattern of temporal and circular intra-African migration in response to jobs and livelihoods' scarcity. In a region that is already rife with violent extremism, organised criminal networks and radicalisation, the failure to recognise that intraregional migration relieves tensions on overburdened communities adds fuel to an explosive mix.

108 Brachet, J. 2012. *Op. cit.*, 249–252; *Id.*, 2011. *Op. cit.*, 8.

109 The familiar images of people travelling on top of freight trucks—often presented to illustrate stories on irregular migration to Europe—in effect capture the means of transport of economic migrants that travel to the gold mines in Djado, north Niger. IOM, *op. cit.*; personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August.

110 *Flow Monitoring Points – Niger February–June 2016*, IOM DTM, Geneva, 2016, <http://www.globaldtm.info/dtm-niger-flow-monitoring-information-sheets-february-june-2016/> (accessed November 2016). Actual numbers may have been higher because smugglers bypassed the town of Séguédine (where the IOM's monitoring point is located) during the first months of 2016. The reasons for this will be discussed in more detail below.

The security sector's role in the north

Weekly convoys transporting goods and people depart from Agadez to Sebha each Monday, the day the 'desert track to Libya turns into a highway with dozens of cars going in the same direction.'¹¹¹ These convoys travel with military escorts to Dirkou to protect the travellers from attacks by armed bandits, better known as the *coupeurs de route* (roadcutters).¹¹² This is not a novel development, but a practice that can be traced back to the 1991 Tuareg and Tebu rebellion, when the frequent occurrence of rebel and bandit attacks in the north led the Nigerien government to organise military convoys to supply the northern towns. It required all vehicles travelling in the region to do so as part of these convoys—a requirement that still holds in the present day.¹¹³ The 4x4 terrain wagons transporting migrants join these convoys for security purposes as well.¹¹⁴ The drivers and guides are heavily armed themselves. From Séguédine onwards, military escorts are no longer needed as the presence of French and Nigerien armed forces in the region actively prevents banditry.¹¹⁵

One important consequence of this decade-old practice of convoy travel is that it has institutionalised the role of Nigerien state agents in the Saharan migration system from below. The necessary clustering of migrants in convoys allowed security forces and local public officials to start taxing migrants arbitrarily along the route.¹¹⁶ A 2013 blog report noted that these practices had become established to such an extent that migrants

111 IOM, *op. cit.*, 8. The convoys pass through Séguédine between Tuesday and Thursday. Cars that are driven/owned by Libyan smugglers continue on to Sebha, where they arrive on Friday. These cars have double number plates, which are changed at the border. Cars that are driven/owned by Nigerien smugglers tend to pass over their cargo into the hands of Libyan smugglers near the border. Personal interview, high-level public official working in the field of migration, 2016, Niamey, Niger, 2 August.

112 *Coupeur de route* is the common denominator for any group roaming the countryside for income that does not belong formally to the state security forces. In this sense, one may think of former rebels, members of armed forces that join armed bandits in their spare time (or loan out their guns to them), etc. In practice, the distinction between state and nonstate armed groups is often very blurry. Personal communication, Sahel expert, 2016, The Hague, The Netherlands, 13 July.

113 Brachet, J. 2012. *Op. cit.*, 245.

114 Accounts from the region suggest that this practice had become less common in late 2016 due to the increase in security operations targeting human smuggling. Personal communication, Agadez migration expert, 2016. The Hague, The Netherlands, 1 November.

115 IOM, *op. cit.*; also see: Westcott, T. 2016. 'An Open Secret: The People-smugglers of Southern Libya', *Middle East Eye*, 18 March.

116 Brachet, J. 2012. *Op. cit.*, 245–246. It has even been stated that that 'travel within the country depends on the good will of state security forces.' *Id.*, 2011, *op. cit.*, 6. The same has been stated for contraband smuggling and the facilitation of irregular migration more generally. Lacher, W. *Op. cit.*, 71.

even received receipts when paying the authorities.¹¹⁷ The practice of extracting tolls continues to be visible in the present day. On the way between Agadez and the Libyan border, for example, migrants pass three checkpoints where both driver and passengers need to pay a fee to continue their journey.¹¹⁸ Whereas smugglers need to maintain a competitive price, the security forces hence benefit from the high migration volume to make a profit. This is not to say that security forces can up their prices without a limit. In the desert relay town of Dirkou, for example, security forces conflicted with one another over the division of proceeds. Dirkou's mayor settled the conflict by issuing a formal decree to settle the distribution of funds between the various forces.¹¹⁹

At the same time, and to avoid having to pay in Dirkou, smugglers started circumventing this post and have now taken their route further up north. In response, this mixed checkpoint has now shifted to Séguédine, which constitutes the last formal border control post between Niger and Libya.¹²⁰ The difficulties that the armed forces are up against in taxing human smugglers along the Agadez-Libya route—when there's a clear profit in it for them—speaks volumes as to the difficulties involved in policing the vast Sahelian desert more generally. This is also visible at subsequent checkpoints at Dao Timi and Madama, which are managed by the armed forces. The checkpoint at Dao Timi is located in a strategic location, that is, in an area surrounded by mine fields. This means that less traffic circumvents this checkpoint, although an estimated 20 percent of drivers still feel secure enough to navigate the land mine fields on their own account.¹²¹

117 Pellet, J. 2013. 'Niger/Agadez, le prix pour migrer vers la Libye', *Occitan-Touareg Blog*, contribution posted on 6 November 2013, <http://occitan-touareg-over-blog.com/2013/11/niger-agadez-le-prix-pour-migrer-vers-la-libye.html> (accessed November 2016). An internal report by Niger's anticorruption body HALCIA published that same year similarly documents the routine nature of municipal taxes, checkpoint fees and border bribes. See: Lewis, D. *Op. cit.*

118 The money paid for the journey between Agadez and Sebha is reportedly split between the owner of the ghetto and the driver and does not include the money migrants spend on food and checkpoints. Similar bribery practices are visible on the road between Arlit and Algeria. See: C. Mann, *op. cit.* The first checkpoint, manned by a mixed group of armed, gendarmerie and police forces, used to be located in Dirkou. Reports dating back to 2013 indicate that although migrants were required to pay 1,000 CFA (1.50 EUR) at checkpoints along the Agadez-Sebha route, the Dirkou checkpoint formed a notable exception. Given that multiple security forces manned the checkpoint, it cost migrants 13,500 CFA (20 EUR), which the various forces divvied up between them. A recent estimation by the IOM suggests that this amount had gone up to 80,000 (122 EUR) over the course of 2016. Personal interview, former migrant, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 3 August; personal interview, former migrant, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August; IOM, *op. cit.*; also see: Pellet, J. *Op. cit.*

119 Personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August.

120 Nevertheless, the Séguédine checkpoint still fails to capture all traffic on the route to Libya, as the smugglers' familiarity with the area allows them to take other routes. IOM, *op. cit.*

121 IOM, *op. cit.*

This serves as an important reality check for policy makers that expect the Nigerien security forces to be able to police the desert effectively.

Security forces are also limited in the extent to which they can increase these road taxes indefinitely due to popular concerns. The fact that the security forces manning the Séguédine checkpoints lowered their prices in early 2016 corroborates this. A previous increase in road taxes had led human smugglers to start circumventing Séguédine altogether. The local population did not appreciate this development, as its economy had become increasingly geared towards the smuggling industry. The people therefore requested that the security forces lowered their prices to increase Séguédine's attractiveness as a point of transit. This action, which benefited the security forces themselves as well by increasing their dwindling taxation income, proved successful. Migration flows through Séguédine increased again from April 2016 onwards.¹²²

Migrants cross the border at the Tummo border post. This border post's importance waxes and wanes with Libya's formal migration policy. Under Qadhafi, the border was closed to migrants at times—leading human smugglers to circumvent Tummo altogether and to bring migrants into Libya secretly. The scarcity of border posts at the Libyan border facilitated this strategy.¹²³ At other times, border police proved more easily corruptible, allowing human smugglers to cross the border at the official checkpoint at a cost of 130,000 CFA (200 EUR) per migrant.¹²⁴ According to one key respondent from the international community, these practices occur along all borders in Niger, as border officials are generally corrupt and in close cahoots with traffickers that often belong to the same ethnic or kinship networks.¹²⁵ After the fall of Qadhafi, the border post stands vacated and human smuggling networks now capitalise on the secure control that the Tebu—a tribe involved in the smuggling trade itself, as will be discussed in more detail below—holds over the area.¹²⁶ As this series' Libya report discusses in more detail, these Tebu militias seek to legitimise their authority position by vying for European recognition

122 *Niger Flow Monitoring – Quarterly Report (Feb 2016–April 2016)*, IOM, Niamey, 2016, https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_hLuy9q1oXQUzdISTRPdTVwazg (accessed November 2016).

123 Personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August. There are many routes through the desert to Libya, which depend on security conditions and relations with the local community.

124 Brachet, J. 2011. *Op. cit.*, 8; *Id.* 2012. *Op. cit.*, 251–252. According to a Frontex report, this practice was facilitated by the fact that 'border guards who are sent to remote regions consider this a form of professional punishment and are therefore unmotivated.' Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*, 23.

125 Personal interview, member of the international community working in the security sector, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 2 August; also see: Reitano, T. and Shaw, M. *Op. cit.*; Komlavi Hahonou, E. 2016. *Corruption, Insecurity and Border Control in Niger*, DIIS Policy Brief, Copenhagen, DIIS.

126 Reitano, T. and Shaw, M. *Op. cit.*, 39; Westcott, T. *op. cit.*; personal communication with a western diplomat, 2016. The Hague, The Netherlands, 22 September.

of their ability to secure the south Libyan border. In practice, however, such a role could be of partial effect only due to their heavy involvement in the smuggling industry.

From the above, it becomes clear that the Nigerien security forces' involvement in human smuggling is not an isolated phenomenon. The more structural dimension underlying this involvement is that of the security forces' severe underfunding. Indeed, although the government started to invest in the armed forces after the last Tuareg rebellion, it merely upgraded its military hardware and training.¹²⁷ These new investments did not result necessarily into higher salaries. In addition, the anticorruption body HALCIA found the military budget earmarked to buy fuel, spare parts and foods to disappear in the capital.¹²⁸ The armed forces use the money made through more illicit means, be it the taxation of illicit trade and smuggling routes or their active involvement in such activities, to supplement their income and to keep their bases running.¹²⁹ As one high-level public official put it succinctly, 'it is the smugglers that supply the fuel to military outposts.'¹³⁰

Regardless of these relationships between irregular migration and security forces, part of the current EU and UNODC policies focus on improving the strength of securitised approaches to human smuggling (see Figure 4 for an overview). Moving beyond questions of whether these forces are reliable partners to work with in the fight against irregular migration, some destabilising effects of these policies have already been identified in Agadez. Firstly, and as discussed above, police forces have started rounding up human smugglers and ghetto leaders, resulting in the arrest of 47 individuals since the adoption of the 2015 antismuggling law. Local authorities did not possess sufficient capacity, however, to deal with the legal implications of these arrests. As a consequence, smugglers have been thrown in jail without any charges and/or sentencing.¹³¹ This clearly violates principles of rule and law and human rights.

127 Idrissa, A. 2014. *In a Neighborhood on Fire: 'Security Governance' in Niger*, Sahel Research Group Working Paper No. 8, Gainesville, FL, University of Florida; Millar, C., Nadeau, J. and Guy-Arcand, M. 2013. *Republic of Niger. Risk Assessment Report*, Country Indicators for Foreign Policy, Carleton University and the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs; IRIN News. 2013. 'After Mali, Niger Battles to Secure its Borders', *IRIN News*, 13 September.

128 Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, *op. cit.*, 23.

129 Telephone interview, expert on the Nigerien security sector, 2016. The Hague, The Netherlands, 16 September.

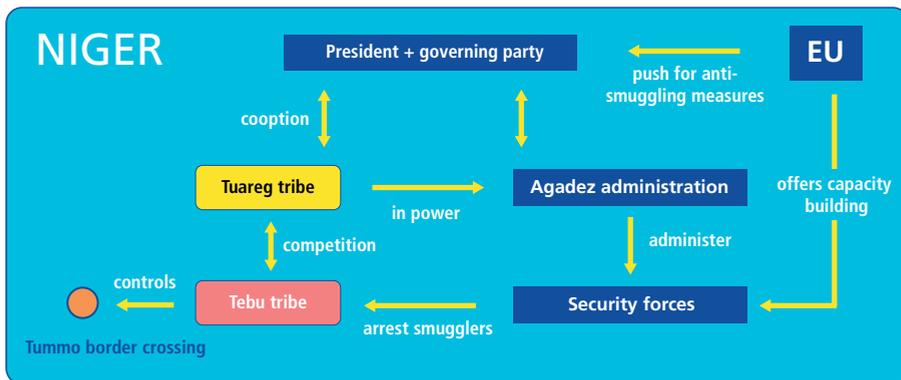
130 Personal interview, high-ranking magistrate with experience in investigating irregular migration, 2016. Niamey, Niger, 4 August.

131 Personal communication, Agadez migration expert, 2016. The Hague, The Netherlands, 1 November.

Secondly, the arrests that have been made, as well as the 67 vehicles that have been seized, form part of a campaign that targets one subset of smugglers only: the Tebu. This should come as little surprise given that the Agadez police fall under the local structure of government, which is headed by Tuareg elites.¹³² The securitized antismuggling approach thereby fails to take into account existing intertribal rivalries and power struggles, which—as discussed above—have only been exacerbated by recent increases in irregular migration and smuggling proceeds. The risks this generates for local stability are very real. Indeed, police forces had to transfer the seized 4x4s to an army compound as angry Agadez inhabitants threatened to overrun and burn down the police station where these vehicles were impounded.¹³³

By running roughshod over local interests, and by their implementation in a manner that is insensitive to local conflict dynamics, these securitised approaches to migration management thereby run the risk of undermining the legitimacy of the state, which—as the previous sections have shown—is already precarious to begin with. In its haste to stop irregular migration, these EU-driven campaigns thereby neglect larger issues of stability and good governance. Cooperation with local security forces should always depart from the recognition that state actors are not necessarily neutral actors and that any attempts to portray them as such should be cause for concern.

Figure 4 The coopted route’s political dynamics



132 *Ibid.*

133 *Ibid.*

Conclusion and recommendations

In 2015, the government of Niger launched its law on the smuggling of migrants. This report has shown, however, that what has changed over the last years is not the Nigerien states' desire to fight irregular migration but the global normative acceptance of migration. International pressure on the Nigerien government to stop trans-Saharan migration flows thereby overlooks that irregular migration and human smuggling practices are firmly embedded in local and national economic, political and security networks. It follows that the Nigerien government's capacity and willingness to act as a strong partner in EU antimigration policies should not be taken for granted.

In addition, the report has hinted to the fact that intra-African migration forms the bulk of migration that takes place in the region and that it is an important livelihood protection strategy for people faced with climatic challenges and a lack of economic opportunities. The migration industry has become a main driver of economic development within Niger itself as well. These are complex facts, because Niger is also an example of how allowing remote regions to develop themselves based on illicit proceeds may empower irregular armed forces and may thereby sow the seeds for prolonged and/or future conflict. Rather than focusing on migration in isolation, this suggests that more conflict-sensitive policies are needed that treat migration as part of a broader effort aimed at building and maintaining stability in the region.

This leads to the following policy recommendations:

- In light of the multitude of migratory streams that constitute trans-Saharan irregular migration, a vital precondition for European responses to trans-Saharan migration is to *understand more clearly which migratory streams end up in Europe*—and to develop policies that target these streams only.
- The Nigerien case has illustrated the destabilising influence of securitised manners that are introduced without taking into account local conflict dynamics. The lesson this case teaches us is that *collaboration with security forces in fragile states should always depart from a clear mapping of the actors on the ground: who are the main authority figures, how do they relate to other authority figures, how do they finance their activities, and to what extent are they engaged in the human smuggling trade*. The Nigerien example also outlines that security sector policies have little chance of contributing to local stability and good governance if they are not accompanied, or even preceded by, substantial investments in politically sensitive capacity building and rule of law initiatives.

- Perhaps the most important effect of irregular migration on regional (in)stability is through its contribution to local economies. It is imperative that future policies *pay attention to the relation between irregular migration, local economies and the microdynamics of smuggling and political authority in migration hubs* such as Agadez. This would allow for the identification of concrete entry points for action, such as by building on existing stabilizing efforts while possibly addressing more destabilising elements through law enforcement approaches. In this sense, one could think about private sector development and good governance programs that are tailored to the local context.
- Lastly, the case of Niger shows that some of migration's irregular dynamics also feed into national political life through bus company owners' financial contributions to elections campaigns and these owners own involvement in the governing party. These practices, which stand in the way of effective policy formation targeting trafficking activities more generally and which hollow out the state from within, can only be rooted out through a *more general focus on issues of good governance and the funding of politics and elections*. Targeting such issues should depart from more systematic efforts to track the loops connecting criminal activities with preexisting routes of patronage and influence trafficking.

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