



Accessing the most vulnerable people in Agadez and Ouagadougou

Full Report

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Part of the **SSS II** programme





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What is IMREF?

This report was written by IMREF. IMREF is the Independent Monitoring, Rapid Research and Evidence Facility of the SSS Phase II programme commissioned by the Department for International Development (DFID). It is delivered by a consortium led by Integrity Global, which includes Seefar, IMPACT Initiatives, and the Danube University Krems.

IMREF aims to provide programme stakeholders with a better understanding of results, to improve accountability through monitoring and verification activities, and to identifying gaps and areas where partners could strengthen delivery. IMREF will also facilitate adaptation and learning in SSS II by delivering and using evidence from research to inform programmatic and potentially policy decisions to that support vulnerable people in mixed migration flows.

Safety, Support and Solutions Phase II (SSS II)

DFID's Safety, Support and Solutions Phase II (SSS II) programme is a migration programme which aims to make migration safer and provide critical humanitarian support, resulting in fewer deaths and less suffering along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR).



SSS II is implemented by IOM, UNICEF, British Red Cross, and a consortium led by the Danish Refugee Council. SSS II takes a route-based approach when responding to the complex needs of mixed migrant populations including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and victims of trafficking, in a wide range of countries along the CMR.



Executive Summary

People in mixed migration journeys from West and East Africa towards Libya, Algeria and Tunisia, and ultimately Italy, transit along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR). On the CMR, they are vulnerable to harm, including violence, physical abuse and exploitation.

Providing direct assistance to these transit migrants comes with specific challenges that differ from other humanitarian displacement contexts. In particular, organisations report that they need a more nuanced understanding on who the most vulnerable transit migrants are in mixed migration contexts along the CMR, who should be targeted for assistance among transit migrants as a result, and how to access transit migrants in the context of armed conflict segments of the route.

To fill these gaps, this study looks at vulnerabilities among migrants in two key transit hubs – Ouagadougou and Agadez – and analyses how humanitarian actors target and seek to access vulnerable migrants in those two locations. To do so, it draws from:

- A desk review of 68 reports, academic articles and programme documents from Implementing Partners of the Safety, Support and Solutions Phase II (SSS II) programme and other relevant partners;
- Interviews with 30 local stakeholders (including bus station workers, smugglers, local government representatives, local community leaders, and police officers);
- Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with 37 humanitarian and development service providers;
- Structured focus group discussions (FGDs) and case studies with a total of 136 transit migrants (including 33 women and 10 children).

The study provides insight into the vulnerabilities of the qualitative sample, how they evolved, and how to address them. However, the methodology of the study is purely qualitative and does not engage a representative sample of all vulnerable migrants in Ouagadougou and Agadez.

Vulnerabilities in Ouagadougou and Agadez

- **Among the study's participants, vulnerability increase the longer migrants journey along the CMR.** As migrants are increasingly exposed to different forms of extortion and abuse, their financial resources diminish and their physical and mental stresses increase. At later stages of the journey, migrants also become increasingly dependent on smugglers for transportation – when they are most frequently subjected to physical abuse, torture and sexual assault. This implies that migrants who spend more time en route, including those who are stranded or expelled from Algeria or Libya, are generally among the most vulnerable. While all migrants experience situational vulnerability, these often amplify the vulnerabilities of women, children, and migrants with disabilities or chronic illnesses.
- **As a result, migrants' levels of vulnerability appear to generally be lower in Ouagadougou than Agadez.** In Agadez, transit migrants have no alternative but to rely on smugglers for transportation. In response to the European Union's (EU) attempts to manage migration flows, smugglers in Agadez increasingly use less frequented and more dangerous routes to avoid detection by authorities. Moreover, migrants who have been expelled from Libya or Algeria and have gone back to Agadez or Ouagadougou to resume their journey, and have then become stranded, are particularly vulnerable as they have often been exposed to serious instances of harm. The study confirms, however, that there are still many vulnerable migrants in need of assistance in Ouagadougou.

Targeting vulnerable migrants

- **Given challenges in reaching highly mobile migrants, organisations have taken different approaches to targeting the most vulnerable migrants.** They either use a broad understanding of vulnerability or adopt a more focused approach targeting specific groups. The former approach refers to a wide range of vulnerability criteria and sees transit migrants as vulnerable by nature given the harm they are exposed to during the journey. The latter approach targets specific groups which are particularly vulnerable, such as unaccompanied minors and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) survivors in transit or vulnerable children travelling internally or regionally. Few organisations were

actively using tools that help monitor vulnerabilities in given transit hubs to revisit targeting strategies and criteria.

- **Community mobilisers, volunteers and local authorities report that they struggle to clearly spot all vulnerabilities as some are actively hidden by migrants or not visible at a first look.** This includes survivors of SGBV, LGBTQI-identifying individuals, and underaged youth.
- **There are gaps in ensuring effective targeting through referrals.** Informants described referrals as an effective way to target vulnerable migrants, but findings suggest mechanisms have some gaps. However, field workers say they are not fully familiar with the mandates and support provided by all organisations which are part of the referral mechanism; that phone numbers indicated for referral do not always work; and that some organisations deal with all referrals due to lack of funds.
- **Successful targeting is closely tied to access strategies and the ability to identify migrants in places they transit and live,** either to access them directly or to find ways that ensure migrants receive information on the services available to them.

Accessing vulnerable migrants

- **Organisations noted they had been increasingly successful at accessing migrants by building networks with key focal points.** To improve access to highly mobile migrants, organisations have built networks in different migration hubs; notably by sending volunteers and community mobilisers to main migration intersections in Ouagadougou and Agadez (particularly bus stations). Organisations also work with local migrant associations and engage with smugglers to access migrants in clandestine networks. However, a lack of coordination among organisations in migration intersections within Ouagadougou and Agadez and inconsistent engagement with migrant associations appeared to limit the extent to which this strategy is working effectively.
- **Significant access barriers remain for humanitarian actors to access migrants, and migrants to access services.** These barriers limit access to certain vulnerable migrants, including transit migrants in smuggling networks, female migrants in brothels and migrants in jail.
- **There is mixed feedback regarding the availability of accurate information about support services for migrants along the route.** Migrants who have less information about support services are those at earlier stages of the route and those who travel alone. Even when migrants are aware of the presence of aid organisations, some are unsure what services are available to them, if they are eligible; and how to approach organisations in case of need.
- **The lack of trust in humanitarian actors severely limits transit migrants' uptake of available services on the CMR.** Migrants may not be willing to access services provided by humanitarian organisations due to perceptions that they will be forced or encouraged to return to their country of origin, despite suffering from financial losses, physical and mental health-related vulnerabilities. This raises questions around organisations' ability to reach migrants travelling to North Africa and Europe.
- **It is unclear which strategies are most effective at incentivising smugglers to refer vulnerable migrants to aid organisations and how to prevent potential ethical concerns** and the reputation of organisations, including with a view to the host community. There is evidence that lack of coordination among aid organisations in Agadez has limited access because multiple field workers send different messages creating suspicions.

Recommendations to implementing partners (IPs)

Gap in service provision	Recommendations
<p>Lack of clarity around targeting and access strategies creates a risk that the programme is not reaching vulnerable groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop clear vulnerability criteria for different programming hubs to define which groups the programme understands to be the most vulnerable. • Develop access strategies for reaching different types of vulnerable migrants. This could draw on a stakeholder mapping exercise for key programming hubs to identify entry-points for reaching different vulnerable migrants. For instance, for migrants in jail, this could include local paralegals, rights organisations, or intermediaries with access to jails. • Use Research, Analysis, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (RAMEL) to identify who the programme is not reaching and adapt strategies. This can be done by adapting RAMEL tools to capture information on different vulnerabilities, and integrating this information into learning strategies – for instance, add as a standing item at learning fora (e.g. monthly meetings, programme reviews, learning workshops).
<p>First responders struggle to detect vulnerable migrants because they have to rely on the “first look” at migration intersections. More complex models of targeting are likely to run into challenges being implemented in the field.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train field workers on identifying a wider range of vulnerabilities, regardless of their organisation’s specific mandate, and specifically with a view to identifying vulnerabilities less visible at a first look. This would allow for not leaving vulnerable migrants behind and improving referrals to relevant actors following detection and first contact with migrants. • Opportunities for shared training courses include ongoing trainings for the Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability (DoMV) organised by the IOM.
<p>Lack of coordination and/or clear messaging in key migration hubs leads to ineffective referrals. First responders lack information about the services other organisations provide or the targeting criteria used by all organisations. This also appears to contribute to misconceptions that may create suspicions among migrants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a shared strategy and coordination plan through existing Migration Protection Working Groups. This strategy should include, at a minimum: i) a mapping of visits in key migration intersections, ii) clear referral pathways, iii) common procedures for sharing research and analysis, detection of vulnerabilities, approach to smuggling actors, local government, and local organisations (including migrant associations), and iv) a strategy on building trust with key actors. • Map referral pathways and share targeting criteria for each organisation, so that referrals can be effective. This can be done by hosting a workshop that brings together all relevant actors. • Nominate a single actor that could be in charge of screening migrants in main transit intersections; leading referral processes; and staying updated on new actors, target groups and changes in focal points within organisations.
<p>Tools to monitor and understand vulnerabilities are not being used to adapt targeting strategies and to adapt associated access strategies to the most vulnerable migrants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a regular process for updating vulnerability criteria and making it a living document. Define: i) sources for monitoring vulnerabilities; ii) process for reviewing targeting; iii) roles and responsibilities within the process; iv) a timeframe. For instance, this process could be integrated into (bi-)annual programme reviews. • This could take place through an organisation that acts as focal point for the rest of the area coordination platform, or through an independent coordination team co-funded by all organisations with

	<p>Research, Analysis, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (RAMEL) capacity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use contextual analysis to identify scenarios and related mitigation strategies or programmatic adaptations which can be quickly implemented if required. A good example is the Emergency Plan of Action implemented by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and a range of national Red Cross societies. The IFRC adapts its response depending on weekly reports from local staff at the border and regularly re-develops scenario planning of future contextual changes.¹
<p>Migrants appear to lack trust in humanitarian actors and local governments amid fears of being returned. In part, this is due to misperceptions that organisations force migrants to return.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing coordination platforms to organise day-to-day coverage at bus stations, ghettos, and key neighbourhoods to clearly communicate available support assistance by different aid organisations and to prevent misconceptions and misinformation that may create suspicions among migrants. IPs should also consider joint visits in migrant hubs to inform audiences about the entire range of support services available and inform migrants about the organisations' impartiality and voluntariness of AVRR. • When implementing programmes jointly or in coordination with the local government, consider whether public entities are perceived as neutral and well-intentioned by migrants.
<p>In Agadez, smugglers are often gatekeepers to migrants, including when they are at their most vulnerable. Many organisations engage but lack of coordination between organisations appears to further limit smugglers' willingness to engage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Political Economy Analyses (PEAs) on local smuggling dynamics in key programming hubs or segments along the CMR to understand the incentives, interests and needs of actors in the smuggling network. • Establish a clear organisational policy on when and how to engage with smugglers based on existing evidence. Use this policy as a basis for coordinating with other organisations and working towards a shared approach for engaging with smugglers.
<p>In Ouagadougou, working with migrant associations and volunteers appears to be a promising practice for reaching vulnerable migrants but there is a need for more sustained engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen contact and exchange with migrant associations both at informal and institutional levels and do regular "check-ins" to ensure the relationship is maintained. • Communicate on what services they can and cannot offer to migrants and provide clear and transparent information on the criteria for receiving assistance. Referrals by migrant associations will be inefficient and can undermine migrants' trust if expectations for support are not met.

¹ KI Panama Red Cross, October 2019.

Recommendations to donors

Key Gap	Recommendations
<p>Evidence suggests targeting and access strategies (specifically coordination issues) have continued to pose key challenges to migration programming. Some stakeholders noted a lack of clarity on targeting at the programme level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify policy on targeting and provide clear direction to implementers on what success looks like for programmes that target transit migrants. This could be facilitated by commissioning a review of data on vulnerabilities among different groups within migration flows and using it to set clearer targets at the programme level. • Convene working groups with experts and programme stakeholders during design phases of programmes focused on developing clear targeting and access strategies. For migration programming, these could include: i) defining new programmatic approaches, including those based on a route-based logic; ii) defining a clear policy on targeting (including for local populations and specific sub-groups) for different areas where the programme is working; and iii) detailing strategies for access, including on complex issues, focusing on engaging smugglers and working with local authorities.
<p>Lack of trust due to misperceptions of humanitarian actors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission further research on issues surrounding trust to develop effective strategies. Different topics could include: i) perceptions of migrant-targeted support programmes; ii) the role of host communities in creating trust and accessing vulnerable migrants; iii) impact on trust of linking immediate humanitarian assistance with return programming; and iv) investigating different levels of trust in different community actors (including humanitarian organisations), to identify effective entry points for service delivery to migrants.
<p>Vulnerabilities are likely to be highest among stranded, expelled migrants. Vulnerabilities are also highest later in the route. There is also evidence that stranded and expelled migrants are particularly vulnerable to financial, physical and mental stress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate greater shares of funding towards key programming hubs later in the route. Assistance should be available along the route but evidence suggests this is where needs and tensions are highest. • Fund increased programming tailored to the situation of expelled and stranded migrants. This could be facilitated by targeted needs assessments. • Create an area-based strategy for key programming hubs where needs are high and complex that explicitly detail priorities. Strategies could draw on an analysis of needs of different population groups (migrants with different types of vulnerability, local residents, local authorities) and work done by different actors. Strategies could draw from: i) a review of evidence; ii) commissioning additional research, including PEAs and stakeholder mapping exercises; and iii) consultations with key actors within each hub. Strategies could include explicit coordination mechanisms. Developing on the
<p>Security personnel are key sources of abuse for migrants along the CMR.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy to address the role of local government entities in causing harm to migrants. This could include making funding for programming to government actors conditional on spot checks.

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Acronyms

4Mi	Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative
AMiRA	Action for Migrants: Route-based Assistance
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BFM	Beneficiary Feedback Mechanism
BRC	British Red Cross
CMR	Central Mediterranean Route
COOPI	Cooperazione Internazionale
DFID	Department for International Development
DoMV	Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IMREF	Independent Monitoring Research and Evidence Facility
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	Implementing Partner
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MDM	Médecins du Monde
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
RAMEL	Research, Analysis, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SSS II	Safety, Support and Solutions Programme for Refugees and Migrants, Phase II
TdH	Terre des Hommes
ToC	Theory of Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
VoT	Victim of Trafficking

Glossary

Access	"Humanitarian access concerns humanitarian actors' ability to reach populations affected by crisis, as well as an affected population's ability to access humanitarian assistance and services." (UNOCHA) ²
Central Mediterranean Route	The Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) refers to the collection of pathways taken by migrants on mixed journeys from West and Central Africa towards North Africa that can result in attempts to cross the sea towards Italy and Malta from Libya, Algeria, Egypt or Tunisia. (UNSMIL and OHCHR) ³
Forced migration	"A migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion." (IOM) ⁴ Forced migrants may be seeking asylum or be recognised as refugees.
Ghettos	Ghettos are "compounds controlled by operators involved in the irregular migration industry." (Clingendael) ⁵
Migrant associations	Migrant associations are defined as groups of foreign nationals from ECOWAS countries who provide shelter and/or support to migrants travelling regionally or internationally. They may or may not be formalised. ⁶
Mixed migration	"Mixed migration refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by migrant smugglers." (MMC) ⁷
Refugees	A refugee is any person "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." (Article 1 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees)
Returnees	"Returning migrants are persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short-term or long-term) in another country." (OECD) ⁸ Return can be spontaneous and independent, forced by the authorities or assisted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) via Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR). ⁹
Smuggling	"The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident." (UNODC) ¹⁰ In practice, a "voluntary transaction takes place between the migrant and the smuggler, where the latter facilitates the former's

² UNOCHA (2010), [Humanitarian Access](#).

³ UNSMIL and OHCHR (2018), [Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in Libya](#).

⁴ IOM (2019a), [Glossary on Migration](#).

⁵ Clingendael (2018c), [A human rights and peace-building approach to migration governance in the Sahel](#).

⁶ This definition is based on interviews with Red Cross staff members and volunteers in Ouagadougou, December 2019.

⁷ MMC (undated), [What is Mixed Migration?](#)

⁸ OECD (2001), [Glossary of statistical terms](#).

⁹ Adapted from IOM (2019a), [Glossary on Migration](#).

¹⁰ UNODC (2017). [The Concept of "Financial or Other Material Benefit" in the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol](#).

irregular movement.” (Clingendael)¹¹ Actors in the smuggling networks may include drivers, car owners, “coaxers” (intermediaries) and “ghetto” owners.¹²

Stranded migrants

A migrant who for “reasons beyond their control has been unintentionally forced to stay in a country” (European Commission).¹³ Migrants become stranded when they are unable or unwilling to return to their state of nationality or former residence, are unable or unwilling to integrate in the state in which they are physically present, and/or are unable to move to the next leg of their journeys due to lack of resources or legal constraints.¹⁴

Targeting

The process by which “individuals or groups are identified and selected for humanitarian assistance programmes, based on their needs and vulnerability.” (Smith, G., Mohiddin, L. & Phelps, L. (2017))¹⁵

Transit migrants

Individuals who have the intention of continuing their journey on the Central Mediterranean Route as soon as they are able to do so.¹⁶

Trafficking in persons

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons)¹⁷

Trafficked persons may be migrants and/or refugees, but people are also trafficked within their own country of origin. (Clingendael)¹⁸

Vulnerability in mixed migration settings

The inability to avoid, cope with, and recover from exposure or experiences of harm (IOM).¹⁹ Vulnerability is not “predetermined by personal characteristics (e.g. by describing persons with a physical disability as a vulnerable group), but as susceptibility to some type of harm under the influence of personal and situational factors.” (Vogel & Kraher, 2017)²⁰

¹¹ Clingendael (2018d), Clingendael. 2018d. [Caught in the middle](#).

¹² Clingendael (2018b), [Multilateral Damage: The Impact of EU Migration Policies on Central Saharan Routes](#).

¹³ European Migration Network (undated), [Stranded migrant](#).

¹⁴ Adapted from IOM, UNHCR & Save the Children (2016), [Addressing the challenges of mixed migration: training guide](#).

¹⁵ Smith, G., Mohiddin, L. & Phelps, L. (2017), [Targeting in Urban Displacement Contexts](#).

¹⁶ IOM (2019a), [Glossary on Migration](#).

¹⁷ Article 3, paragraph (a) of the [Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons](#).

¹⁸ Clingendael (2018d), Clingendael. 2018d. [Caught in the middle](#).

¹⁹ IOM (2019a), [IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse](#); OHCHR (2017), [Principles and Guidelines migrants in vulnerable situations](#); ICRC (2017), [Approach to Migration](#).

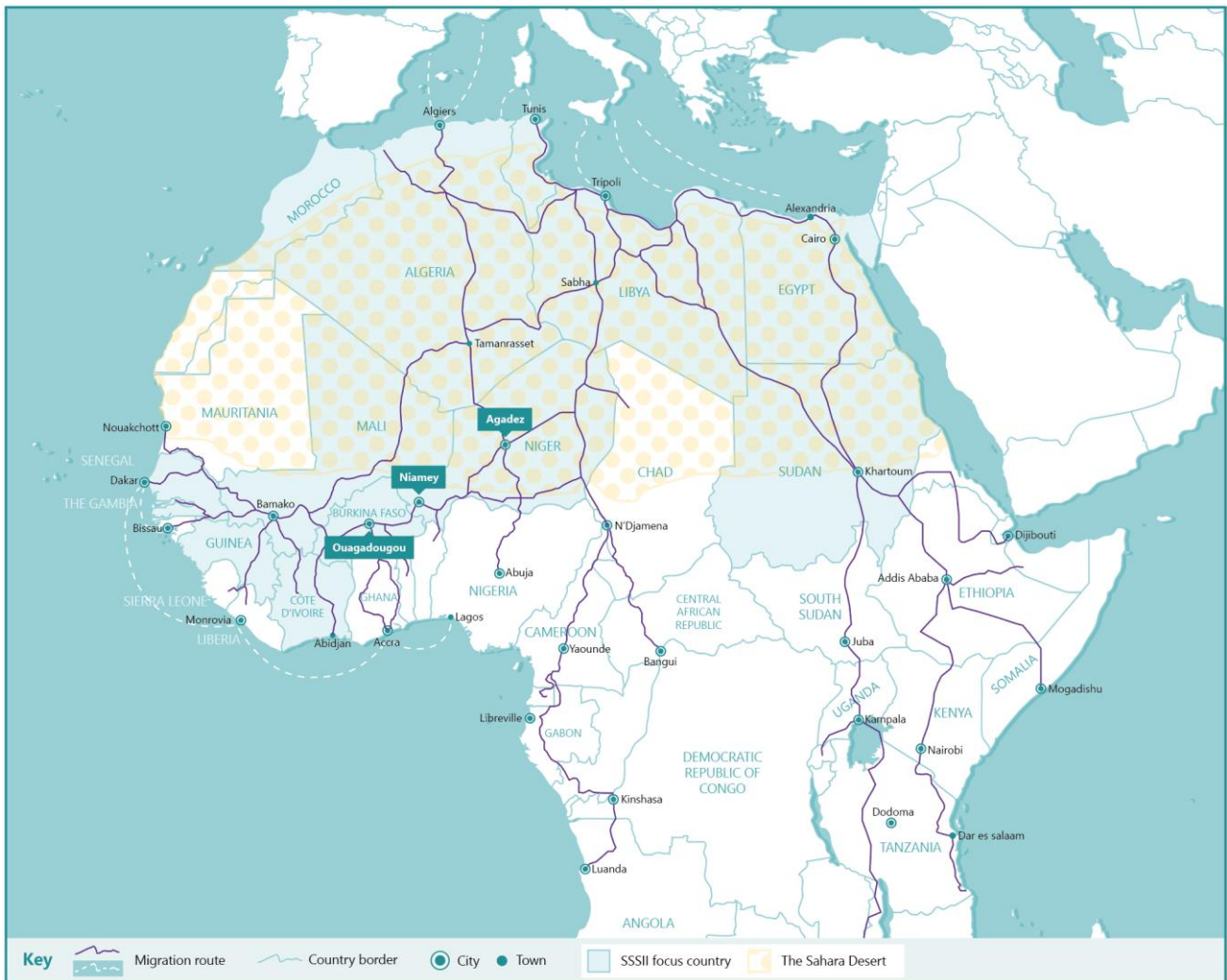
²⁰ Vogel and Kraher. (2017), [Demand-side Interventions Against Trafficking in Human Beings: Towards an Integrated Theoretical Approach](#). DemandAT Working Paper No. 14.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

People on mixed migration journeys transit towards Italy along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), connecting countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with Libya, Tunisia and Algeria (Figure 1).²¹ On the CMR, refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants are vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation in their north-bound overland journeys. Evidence shows that migrants face a range of protection risks such as physical, psychological and sexual abuse, forced labour, trafficking and death when travelling along the route.²²

Figure 1: Main routes on the CMR



²¹ DFID (2018), SSS II Business Case; UNHCR. 2018. Central Mediterranean Situation, January-December 2018; GMDAC. 2019. African Migration to the EU: Irregular migration in context. Migration flows have changed since the start of the programme. In 2018, migrants predominantly took the Central Mediterranean Route on their journey to Europe. In 2019, trends suggest a shift in the routes being used by many West African nationals from the CMR to the Western Mediterranean Route via Mauritania and Morocco. See more at: MMC (2020c). [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: West Africa](#).

²² For a detailed literature review on risks migrants face along the CMR, see: IMREF. 2019. Interim Evidence Review. Recent sources include but are not limited to: Mixed Migration Centre. 2019a. [West Africa 4Mi Snapshot Protection incidents and levels of assistance for people on the move in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso](#); British Red Cross. 2018. [Humanity at a crossroads: Migrants' journeys on the Central Mediterranean Route](#); Bergmann, J., Lehmann, J., Munsch, T. and Powell, W. 2017. [Protection Fallout: How Increasing Capacity for Border Management Affects Migrants' Vulnerabilities in Niger and Mali](#).

Within this context, the Department for International Development (DFID) funded the Safety, Support and Solutions Programme Phase II (SSS II) programme with the aim to make migration safer and to provide critical humanitarian support to mixed migrant populations along the CMR.²³ In particular, SSS II seeks to assist the most vulnerable migrants in transit across the CMR.

However, consultations with SSS II Implementing Partners (IPs)²⁴ highlighted that targeting and accessing the most vulnerable transit migrants is not a straightforward process in mixed migration contexts. Specifically, IPs of SSS II noted significant challenges with regards to the following questions:

- **Who are the most vulnerable migrants in mixed migration contexts along the CMR?** Donors, humanitarian and development organisations are concerned with designing and implementing programmes that reach the most vulnerable migrants at their greatest time of need.²⁵ To ensure they do so, most organisations involved in the delivery of SSS II and interviewed for a 2019 IMREF Evidence Gap Analysis (EGA) called for a more nuanced picture of how vulnerability is shaped by factors such as time spent in transit.²⁶
- **Who should be targeted for assistance among transit migrants?** Some organisations, including in recent publications, argue that current targeting practices are based on prevailing assumptions from other humanitarian displacement contexts rather than the realities of mixed migration, and that these assumptions may not fit with the needs and profiles of migrants on the CMR.²⁷ In a recent study conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), some informants questioned whether migrants heading to North Africa and Europe are the most vulnerable and should be targeted for assistance.²⁸
- **How to access transit migrants?** In large segments of the CMR, organisations also struggle to reach migrants heading to North Africa and Europe due to a range of factors, including conflict environments and migrants actively avoiding detection.²⁹

In response to the challenges highlighted above, this study examines some of the key dynamics related to vulnerability, targeting, and accessing migrants along the CMR. It looks in more detail at vulnerabilities among migrants in two programming transit hubs and presents key targeting and access strategies actors use in these locations, with a view to identifying gaps and good practices. It primarily draws on the practices of SSS II IPs due to their key role providing assistance to transit migrants in Ouagadougou and Agadez. However, the study's findings also contribute to a larger evidence base and provide additional information for the wider community of practitioners, donors and researchers working on migration programming.

1.2 Research Questions

This study selected two transit hubs on the CMR – Ouagadougou and Agadez – to produce evidence allowing for more effective targeting, access and assistance to the most vulnerable transit migrants. The two sites were selected for various reasons. First, Ouagadougou and Agadez receive significant programming attention as key transit hubs on migrants' overland journeys towards North Africa. The two hubs are at different stages of the route; Ouagadougou is at an earlier stage for migrants starting their journeys from West Africa towards Niger or Mali, while Agadez is the last hub before desert crossings to Libya or Algeria. An exploration of those two

²³ SSS II Business Case, 2018.

²⁴ Consultations took place via the IMREF Evidence Gap Analysis (2019a) and the study's Review Group.

²⁵ Review Group consultations, October 2019.

²⁶ IMREF (2019a), Evidence Gap Analysis.

²⁷ This may apply to camp or non-camp displacement settings: "In a 'traditional' humanitarian context, best practice would be to profile or register the entire population with a view to identifying the most vulnerable and ensuring appropriate assistance is provided to those most in need. Many of the practical tools developed to assess vulnerability are based on camp settings, where access is relatively straightforward." Mixed Migration Center (2020a), [Evidence-based operational responses to mixed migration: challenges and best practice](#).

²⁸ Ibid. This recent external report from MMC also discusses difficulties around programming in mixed migration. This is echoed by interviews conducted for this report with Senior Management staff with AMiRA, IOM and UNICEF.

²⁹ Danish Red Cross and Samuel Hall (2018), Migration Needs Assessment in Mali.; Altai Consulting (2018), Final Evaluation of the Project "Addressing the needs of Stranded and Vulnerable Migrants in Targeted Sending, Transit and Receiving Countries.

locations therefore provides a window into better understanding and comparing migrant vulnerabilities at different stages of their journeys, as well as different practices used to target and access vulnerable migrants.

The study has three main objectives:

1. Understanding vulnerabilities in Ouagadougou and Agadez;
2. Analysing how organisations target vulnerable migrants in the two study locations, what are the good practices and gaps; and
3. Analysing how organisations access vulnerable migrants in the two study locations, gaps and good practices.

Table 1: Research Questions

Objectives	Research Questions
Understanding vulnerabilities	What are the key vulnerabilities of migrants in the two study locations and how have these evolved along their journey?
	What factors are shaping vulnerability in the two study locations?
Targeting vulnerable migrants	How do humanitarian and development organisations target migrants? What are good practices and gaps?
	How are SSS II partners monitoring and assessing vulnerabilities in the two study locations?
Accessing vulnerable migrants	What factors are inhibiting or facilitating access to SSS II services and other types of assistance services available to transit migrants?
	Which vulnerable migrant groups are targeted but not reached and why?
	What are the different access strategies being used in these two study locations? What appears to be working, and what lessons can be drawn from successes and challenges?

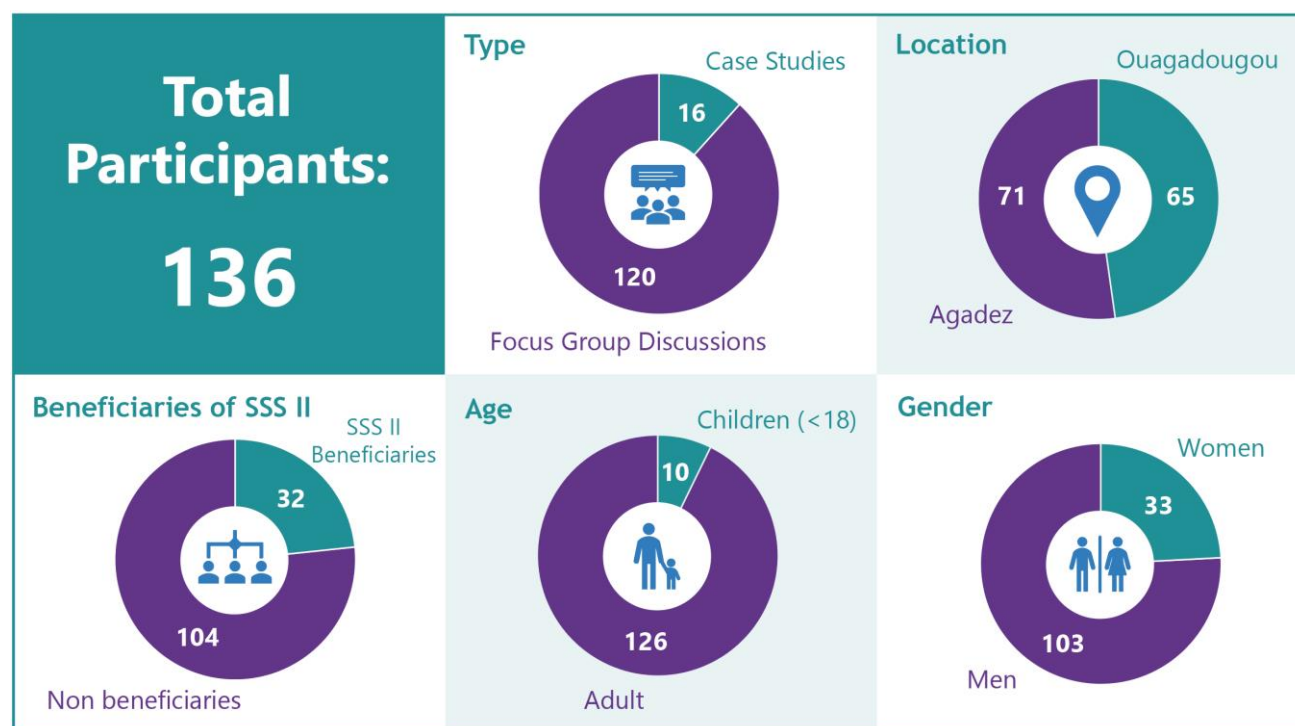
1.3 Methodology

The overarching research and methodological framework relies on a range of qualitative data collection tools used in a sequential approach. These include:

- A **desk review** focused on identifying literature on the definitions of vulnerability; models of targeting; and access strategies humanitarian and development organisations use along the CMR (full list in [Annex 1](#)). IMREF reviewed 68 reports, academic articles, and programme documents from SSS II.
- **Guided area observations** of selected migration-relevant locations in Agadez and Ouagadougou focused on mapping the general profiles of vulnerable migrants and developing strategies to access these profiles for primary data collection. IMREF triangulated observations with interviews with 30 local actors, including community leaders, community-based organisations, bus station drivers, members of smuggling networks, community members and transit migrants.
- **Structured focus group discussions (FGDs) and case studies with 136 transit migrants**, with migrant groups identified during guided area observations. FGDs had between five and seven participants, and separate FGDs were conducted for men and women; for children and adults; and for SSS II beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. IMREF conducted case study interviews with a single participant when enumerators could not identify at least five participants from a similar group. (Table 2 and [Annex 2](#)).

- **Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs)** with 37 humanitarian and development service providers in Agadez and Ouagadougou ([Annex 2](#)). IMREF organised additional KIIs with stakeholders in Niamey who implement programmes in Agadez.

Table 2: Description of FGDs and case studies



1.4 Limitations

There are methodological and practical limitations that affect the findings of this study. Most of these are detailed in [Annex 3](#). Some of the key limitations to note include:

- The study provides insight into the vulnerabilities of the qualitative sample, how those vulnerabilities evolved, and how to address them. However, the methodology of the study is purely qualitative and did not engage a representative sample.
- IMREF faced challenges in accessing some of the most vulnerable migrants. Therefore this report does not provide an exhaustive list of vulnerable profiles that humanitarian and development organisations in the selected areas are targeting but not reaching, and what inhibits migrants with these profiles from accessing assistance. In particular, IMREF did not interview some groups that are generally assumed to have higher levels of vulnerability, such as transit migrants under 15 and over 65 as well as LGBTQI-identifying migrants, despite some informants reporting that they are present in Ouagadougou and Agadez.³⁰
- Literature on good practices in targeting and accessing vulnerable migrants in transit settings is scarce. The study relies on key informants and FGD participants to assess good practices and gaps related to targeting and access.

³⁰ KI IOM Agadez, KI French Red Cross Agadez.

2 Understanding vulnerabilities

The literature identifies two factors that shape migrants' vulnerability as they journey towards their country of destination (Figure 2). These include:

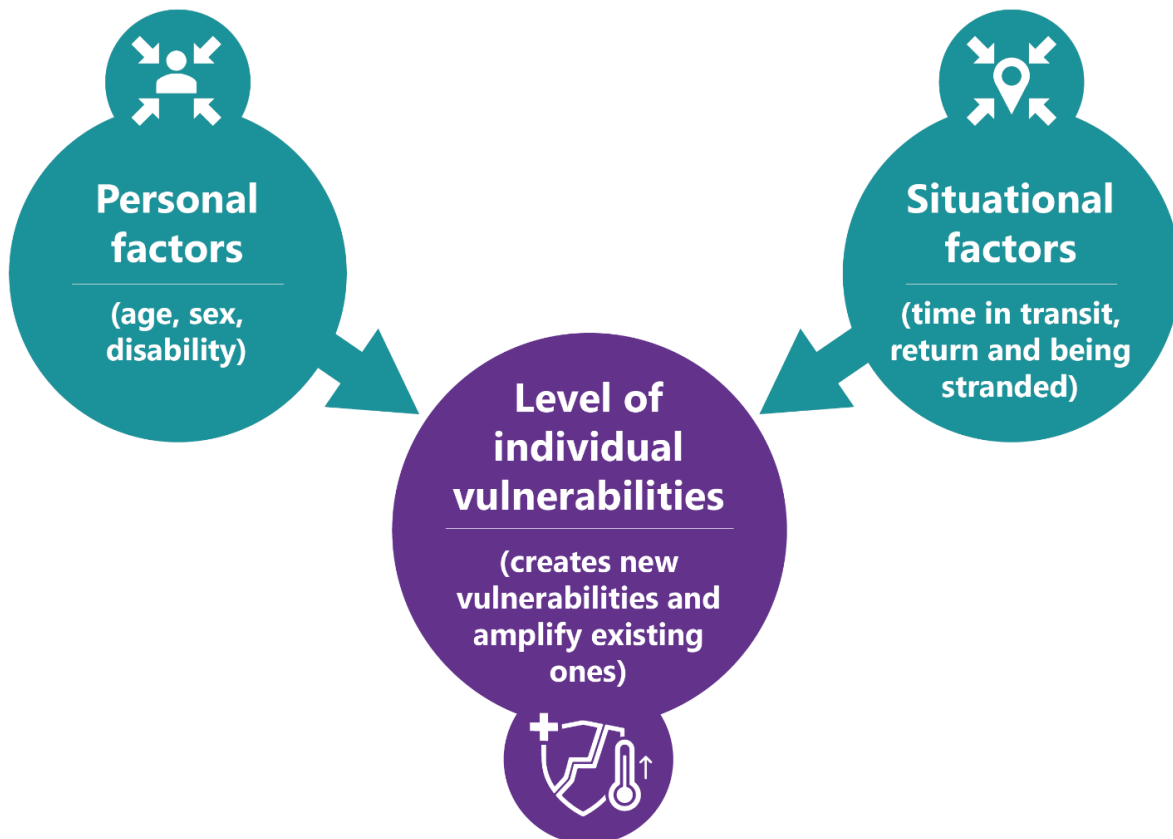
- **Situations and events that occur during transit**, which have an impact on migrants' physical integrity, mental health and overall wellbeing.³¹ Law enforcement authorities (border guards, police), non-state actors (militias, armed groups), and smugglers involved in the transportation of migrants may commit multiple forms of harm.³² The political and conflict contexts of the countries that migrants transit through also shape experiences of harm.
- **Personal and pre-existing characteristics or conditions**, which affect the experiences of harm migrants may face. This includes age, sex, socio-economic background and reasons for leaving the country of origin.³³

Box 1: Examples of understandings of vulnerabilities in mixed migration settings

OHCHR (2017): *"Migrants in vulnerable situations are thus persons who are unable effectively to enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer's heightened duty of care."*

ICRC (2017): *"[ICRC's understanding of vulnerability] takes into account the fact that journeys are often non-linear and involve a great deal of risk, fear and uncertainty; migrants who were not necessarily vulnerable when they left their country of origin might become vulnerable on their way or in the country of destination."*

Figure 2: Factors of Vulnerability



³¹ IMREF (2019a), Evidence Gap Analysis.

³² Clingendael (2018), Migration in Northern Mali: Conflict Sensitivity Analysis and Protection Needs Assessment.

³³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2017), [Principles and Guidelines migrants in vulnerable situations](#); IOM (2017), [Migrant Vulnerability to Human Trafficking and Exploitation: Evidence from the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Migration Routes](#).

Drawing from existing concepts, this study defines “vulnerability” among migrant populations as the inability to avoid, cope with, and recover from exposure or experiences of harm.³⁴ Here, vulnerability is not “predetermined by personal characteristics (e.g. by describing persons with a physical disability as a vulnerable group), but as susceptibility to some type of harm under the influence of personal and situational factors.”³⁵ As findings from this study and other understandings of vulnerability currently in use in mixed migration settings (Box 1) underline, “the key idea is that the combination of personal and situational factors makes the difference and creates vulnerability.”³⁶ This creates complex interactions between a range of personal and situational factors.

Applying this two-pronged concept of vulnerability, the first section explores who the most vulnerable migrants are in the mixed migration transit hubs of Ouagadougou and Agadez. It starts by looking at situational factors in transit to show how situations and events that occur during transit create vulnerabilities for all migrants regardless of personal characteristics. It then explores how pre-existing personal characteristics or conditions³⁷ amplify the vulnerability of migrants with pre-existing personal factors (older persons and children, women, persons with disability and chronic diseases). Finally, the section provides an overview of vulnerability profiles in Ouagadougou and Agadez.

2.1 Vulnerabilities as a result of the journey

Vulnerability increases for all migrants travelling along the CMR as the time spent on the journey lengthens. This is exacerbated by the fact that the last phases of the journey are also the most dangerous.

All migrants described experiencing events during departure, transit and arrival which exposed them to harm, making them less able to avoid and cope with harm in the future. At the same time, migrants with pre-existing personal characteristics or conditions described how these put them at further risk when dealing with those events, thereby amplifying their vulnerability.

Migrants in FGDs evoked three main factors that change as their journeys progress and which appear to have a significant impact on their vulnerability:

Dependence on smugglers



Financial burdens and stress



Physical and mental burdens and stress



For the majority of informants both in FGDs and KIs, these factors tended to be intertwined. Higher dependency on smugglers, for example, meant that migrants lost agency and were more exposed to financial risks and

³⁴ IOM (2019a), [IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse](#); OHCHR (2017), [Principles and Guidelines migrants in vulnerable situations](#); International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (2017), [Approach to Migration](#).

³⁵ Vogel and Kraher. (2017), [Demand-side Interventions Against Trafficking in Human Beings: Towards an Integrated Theoretical Approach](#). DemandAT Working Paper No. 14.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Personal pre-existing characteristics are also often understood as “personal predispositions such as desires, norms, and attitudes [that] shape what individuals want to do in their specific situation.” In this definition, the focus lies more heavily on the wishes that are “unique and individual”. However, as these vary heavily by individual, this study understands pre-existing characteristics primarily from the point of view of norms prescribed through “socialisation in the family and society” where the level of “choice” of the individual herself may be limited, thereby creating externally conditioned vulnerability (see Vogel and Kraher, 2017., p. 7.) Migration programming, however, should not disregard the focus on the individual and their choices; Some migrants, for example, may choose not access services that could support them in reducing their vulnerability or responding to harm (see section 4.1.2).

physical harm as they continued their journey towards North Africa. The lack of resources and higher dependence on smugglers, particularly at later stages of the journey, meant that migrants experienced beating, torture and sexual assault, among others. This combined with the (threat of) harm created new vulnerabilities in migrants and amplified existing conditions. Even if they started their journeys with adequate resources, extortion and abuse rendered many unable to cope with the financial, physical and mental stress of the journey.

As journeys along the CMR are not linear, the stage of the migration journey affected the above three factors and migrants' vulnerability. Interviews with migrants revealed that they were more vulnerable after longer transit periods, after being stranded, or after being expelled. Before arriving in Ouagadougou and Agadez, migrants had variously spent time in transit, become stranded as a result of a lack of resources, and returned after expulsions from Algeria or Libya. This made migrants less able to cope with financial, mental and physical stress.

Drawing from migrants' testimonies, this section therefore looks at how vulnerabilities evolved as a result of the journey. In doing so, dependency on smugglers, migrants' financial situation, and experiences affecting their physical and mental health emerged as impacting most on migrants' vulnerability and the (in-)ability to avoid and recover from harm.

2.1.1 Increasing dependence on and abuse by smugglers

Many migrants in the sample described abuse at the hands of smugglers, including debt bondage, sexual assault, and mistreatment in the desert. Most of these instances happened later in their journey, in Agadez and beyond.³⁸ Few migrants reported instances of abuse by smugglers before this point. When travelling beyond Agadez, migrants reported that they lost agency over their movements. They mentioned cases of forced work (Box 2) due to debt bondage and sexual and physical abuse by smugglers.

Box 2: 40-year-old male migrant from Cameroon, Agadez

"In Tamanrasset I was locked up in a house where I was forced to work, to do what [the smugglers] want... an exploitation of man by man. I did this for a year so I could pay off my debts and regain my freedom."

Migrants also outlined that dependence on smugglers resulted from a lack of knowledge of locations and routes further along in the CMR and a subsequent need for information, which was then primarily provided by smugglers. Many migrants reported that smugglers at earlier stages of the journey had misrepresented the conditions of the journey from Agadez to North Africa. In particular, smugglers had misrepresented the difficulties of crossing the desert. This meant that migrants were not able to prepare adequately for the journey, or to assess whether they were able to withstand the difficulties of the journey based on their physical abilities (Box 3). Coupled with less knowledge of the region and what transport opportunities are available to them, migrants' dependency on information provided by smugglers therefore placed them in a position where they became increasingly vulnerable to harm.

Abuses from smugglers tended to happen later in the journey.

Data collected suggests that, similar to smuggling dynamics on other migration routes³⁹, migrants had fewer personal connections with smugglers the further they journeyed north on the CMR. Past research also finds that smuggling networks do not operate consistently, and with loose ties at different stages of the route.⁴⁰ While migrants may be safer from abuse in early stages of the journey, they were at risk of being abused by smugglers once there was no alternative transportation or when they were less familiar with the conditions of the journey.⁴¹ Referrals from a trusted facilitator did not ensure that abuse would not take place at a later stage of the journey. FGD participants who had used smugglers from an

Box 3: 34-year-old female migrant from Cameroon, interviewed in Agadez, returning from Libya

"When walking in the desert, if you are not fit, [smugglers] will leave you. I was with a group of 45 people. Eight women who were too obese to walk fast were left behind."

³⁸ This mirrors Clingendael research in Gao, which found that migrants are more likely to be abused by smugglers as they arrive in Gao. See Clingendael (2018a).

³⁹ Majidi, Nassim (2018), [Community dimensions of smuggling: the case of Afghanistan and Somalia](#), The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 676, no. 1, pp. 97-113.

⁴⁰ Clingendael (2017), [Turning the Tide: The politics of Irregular Migration in The Sahel and Libya](#). The Hague: Clingendael Institute.

⁴¹ FGD7, FGD28, FGD34, FGD38.

earlier stage of the journey⁴² reported that they had positive interactions with smugglers in their countries of origin and in neighbouring countries, but that this made them more vulnerable at later stages of the journey with different smugglers. For example, an 18-year-old female migrant from Burkina Faso, interviewed in Agadez, explained that she had entered a smuggling network in Zinder, Niger, after travelling by herself from Burkina Faso. Following a positive experience with the ghetto owner, she trusted that she would be safe in the next stage of the journey, travelling in a private vehicle from Zinder to Agadez. After a change of driver at the border, she was sexually abused by the new driver.

2.1.2 Less ability to cope with financial stress as the journey becomes more complex

The loss of financial resources while in transit significantly affected migrants' vulnerability while on the move. Extortion by smugglers and law enforcement authorities increased as migrants travelled further from their place of departure, resulting in significant financial stress (Box 4).⁴³ This was also linked to having limited resources that were spent as the journey continues.⁴⁴

The risk of encountering demands for bribes increased, including for Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) citizens with valid identity cards.⁴⁵ Despite having right of free movement within ECOWAS, migrants in FGDs confirmed that many still faced abuse from security personnel at border points, and by police and other authorities during their journey, including because of an inability to pay bribes. Migrants described the destruction or confiscation of travel documents, phones, or other belongings, strip searches, frisking, beating, torture and sexual assault.

Box 4: 20-year-old male migrant from the Gambia, interviewed in Agadez

"When I was in Senegal and Mali they told me I've got papers, so they let me through. When I went back to Mali and Burkina the police problem started. [...] From Mali to Niamey there are about 14 police stations. And at each police station you have to pay more than 10,000, 15,000 or 20,000 CFA or they'll take you and send you back. [...] They have rooms where they put people. They torture you. [...] In case you don't get any money out, they undress you in front of everyone."

As resources are depleted along the journey, migrants face increasing hardships. Some migrants interviewed reported being forced to sleep at bus stations or in the street because they had run out of funds and their families were unable to support them further.

2.1.3 Increasing physical and mental stress

In FGDs, migrants described how **physical and mental stress increased significantly as they spent more time in transit, returned to countries further downstream, or were unable or unwilling to return to their countries of origin (stranded)**.⁴⁶

Lack of access to water, food and basic hygiene worsens pre-existing conditions and leads to new health-related struggles for migrants. In particular, some migrants interviewed reported becoming infected with malaria and typhoid during expulsions from Libya and Algeria. For migrants with pre-existing chronic illnesses or disabilities, the journey also amplifies existing conditions or creates new disabilities following physical torture by security personnel and smugglers, and the dire conditions of the journey in the desert.⁴⁷

Psychosocial and mental health needs were significant for migrants in the sample who were at later stages of their journey, and for those who had been expelled. Forced work, beatings, torture, SGBV and assaults during border crossings, in Libya and Algeria, and during the expulsion process into northern Niger and Mali further

⁴² FGD28, FGD34, FGD38.

⁴³ IMREF (2019b), Interim Evidence Review.

⁴⁴ Reflections on the variations in vulnerabilities among sub-groups can be found in [Annex 4](#).

⁴⁵ In 1979, the ECOWAS Member States adopted the Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, followed by four supplementary protocols. Burkina Faso and Niger are part of the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol allowing nationals to travel to other ECOWAS countries for up to 90 days with a valid travel document and without requiring an entry visa.

⁴⁶ Migrants described the challenges of being stranded in FGD6, FGD33, FGD38.

⁴⁷ 31-year-old migrant from Benin, in Agadez; 26-year-old migrant from Senegal, in Agadez.

increased physical and mental health needs. Every FGD participant who had been expelled either experienced this themselves or witnessed it happening to others, regardless of their personal characteristics. Those who had undergone this or witnessed it were often left traumatised, with lasting mental health effects and/or suicidal thoughts and tendencies (Box 5). This mirrors academic research conducted in 2017 that found that out of a sample of 385 migrants in Sicily, 50% “were identified and diagnosed with mental health conditions”, with 89% of them having experienced potentially traumatic events during their journey.⁴⁸

Box 5: Local authorities’ representative, Agadez

“A young man from Ethiopia came to me because he had no one to confide in. He said he had seen atrocities when in Libya, and that everyone who went through Libya before coming here has been treated in a degrading manner. A while ago we dealt with at least two or three cases of mental illness, anxiety and even suicide attempts.”

Most key informants underlined that those who were stranded or experienced expulsion from Libya and Alegria were among the most vulnerable in transit migrant populations because of the accumulation of abuses.⁴⁹ In FGDs, migrants who were stranded and had gone through forced returns described significant exposure to harm due to dwindling financial resources and extortions along the route.⁵⁰

Migrants interviewed often expressed that they could not return home empty-handed, as they had already invested significant resources in the journey (Box 6).⁵¹ This prevented them from considering alternatives to journeying to North Africa, such as local integration or return. Some explained that they did not want to access services because they feared they would be forced to return, further entrenching pre-existing vulnerabilities.⁵² In some hubs with more work opportunities like Agadez and Niamey, some migrants reported being stranded for a much longer period, either following expulsion from Libya and Algeria, or before their first journey through the desert.

Box 6: 29-year-old male from Burkina Faso, travelling to Niamey from Ouagadougou

“I can’t go back. I left a wife and two children. Going back with nothing, not even clothes, it’s shameful. Nothing motivates me, it’s because I don’t have money. I think I’ll find a job somewhere before going back home, I can’t go back with nothing.”

Informants described female migrants as particularly vulnerable to becoming stranded and experiencing increased vulnerability because of their gender as well as child-care responsibilities (see section 2.1.1). A worker from the Burkinabé Action Sociale, for example, described a woman who became pregnant during her journey who “simply can’t go back to her family with this pregnancy because they would say that it’s a disgrace to the entire ethnic group.”

Being stranded contributed to further risks due to discrimination from host communities. For migrants who spent long periods of time in host communities, discrimination from those communities contributed to feelings of alienation. They also reported being exposed to theft, violence or exploitation. Migrants in Agadez and Ouagadougou said they had been denied wages (Box 7), received insults from the host community and experienced violence. This mirrors MMC’s research that found that the lack of decent work and poor work conditions may worsen vulnerabilities of migrants who spend long periods of time in transit.⁵³

Box 7: 30-year-old female migrant from Togo, working in a restaurant in Ouagadougou

“Exploitation is there especially with the work of waitresses at bars or restaurant, with our employers, we often have difficulty getting our salaries.”

⁴⁸ Crepet, A., Rita, et al (2017), [Mental health and trauma in asylum seekers landing in Sicily in 2015: A descriptive study of neglected invisible wounds](#). Conflict and Health, 11(1).

⁴⁹ KI IOM Agadez; KI IOM Ouagadougou; KI IRC Niamey; KI Coopi Agadez; KI MDM Agadez

⁵⁰ This was notably discussed by migrants who had been forcibly expelled from Libya and Algeria in FGD25, 26, 28, 36

⁵¹ This is also well-documented in interviews with returnees in West Africa. See more: IOM (2019) [Reintegration Handbook](#); Samuel Hall / IOM (2017), [Setting standards for an integrated approach to reintegration](#).

⁵² This was notably discussed by the participant of CS26.

⁵³ See MMC (2020b), [West Africa 4Mi Snapshot – February 2020 Cost and duration of migration journey](#). It is unclear to what extent work can be a factor of resilience for migrants who work while in transit.

2.2 Vulnerabilities as a result of personal characteristics

Research conducted for this study reflects findings from the literature that personal, pre-existing characteristics and conditions affect exposure to, and recovery from, harm.⁵⁴ Based primarily on data collected for this study through FGDs and KIIs, this section looks in more detail at how pre-existing personal characteristics or conditions amplify the vulnerability of women, children and people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.⁵⁵

2.2.1 Women

Testimonies from female participants in KIIs and FGDs suggest they are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and human trafficking, including sex work. This finding mirrors past reports,⁵⁶ including recent MMC data that showed women face greater vulnerability to harm of every kind (e.g. deaths, sexual assault, physical abuse, robbery, bribes) except detention and kidnapping. This is particularly true with regard to sexual assault.⁵⁷ Data collected for this study reflects MMC findings by confirming that women are exposed to more harm.

Women in Agadez described that they struggle to recover from serious forms of harm while in transit. They reported rape by security personnel in Libya and Niger, by smugglers, and by fellow migrants. Sexual assault, in turn, led to significantly increased vulnerability, including vaginal infections and diseases, unwanted pregnancies, trauma and suicidal tendencies.⁵⁸ Loss of financial resources also forces some women to engage in sex work in both Ouagadougou and Agadez, making them a particularly vulnerable sub-group while in transit.⁵⁹ Women noted that income generated from sex work was not sufficient to fund an onward migration journey, leaving them stranded and unable to attempt or reattempt migration.⁶⁰

Women travelling alone also described being particularly dependent on smugglers to organise their journeys due to additional challenges in accessing information.⁶¹ This supports existing findings that women may follow different travel arrangements and have less freedom during their journeys than male migrants.⁶²

Female respondents and migrants who travelled with them described women transiting along the CMR while being pregnant or with children as particularly vulnerable to harm. Some migrants reported that the harshness of the journey in later stages has led to miscarriages. Childcare, too, was described as a constant issue for many female migrants in both Ouagadougou and Agadez, especially for those who manage to find work during the journey. Female informants with children reported high degrees of stress over what risks the child faces while in transit, as well as the increased drain on resources for the mother.⁶³

FGDs and KIIs also showed that women who become pregnant or deliver a child during the journey risk being stranded for a longer period of time in Ouagadougou and Agadez. This is due primarily to the fear of returning to their place of origin and being rejected by their families and communities as a result of unplanned pregnancies during the journey.

⁵⁴ See notably IOM/UNICEF (2017), [Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation](#); OHCHR (2017), IOM (2017), Vogel and Krahlner (2017).

⁵⁵ LGBTQI-identifying migrants as well as older people also fall under these more vulnerable groups. However, as outlined in the limitations, IMREF was unable to include these groups in the data collection activities and there is limited information on the situation of these groups available through secondary sources. IMREF recommends that the vulnerability of LGBTQI-identifying migrants be explored in detail in a separate study, taking into account the highly sensitive and important Do No Harm and safeguarding approaches required.

⁵⁶ See for instance BBC (2014), [Migrant dreams turn into Sahara sex work](#).

⁵⁷ MMC (2019a), [West Africa 4Mi Snapshot Protection incidents and levels of assistance for people on the move in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso](#).

⁵⁸ Women interviewed in FGD13, FGD18, FGD24, FGD27, FGD28, FGD35, FGD36.

⁵⁹ Médecins Sans Frontières (2019), [Niger, at the crossroads of migration](#).

⁶⁰ FGD27 with foreign sex workers in Agadez.

⁶¹ Women returnees from FGD27, FGD28, FGD36 discussed their experiences before becoming stranded in Agadez.

⁶² Munsch, T., Powell, W., and Joly, S. (2017), [Before the Desert: Conditions and Risks on Mixed Migration Routes through West Africa](#).

⁶³ Discussed by women in FGDs 18, 24, 27, 28, 35, 36; and echoed by male participants in FGD34.

Box 8: Women-specific vulnerabilities - voices from the field

Rape and trauma, 35-year-old female migrant from Cameroon, interviewed in Agadez: *“There’s a friend who went on to Libya where she was raped and then put in jail. She was traumatised, raped by several people and then deported to Cameroon. Before departing her en route to Tripoli, she was raped again by Libyans who were transporting them.”*

Sex work, 39-year-old female migrant from Democratic Republic of the Congo, Agadez: *“I know that many migrants face challenges, especially on food and shelter, which is what drives many of the young girls to prostitute themselves.”*

2.2.2 Children

Existing literature about child migration finds that children, unaccompanied minors, adolescents and youth are at particularly high risk of human trafficking, exploitation and physical abuse.⁶⁴ However, an in-depth understanding of child vulnerabilities on the CMR is complex as children on the move towards North Africa and Europe may be invisible during their transit through Burkina Faso and Niger. Research by Save the Children (2018) showed that, to protect themselves from abuse, children on the move may aim to stay invisible, choosing not to disclose their plans and avoiding locations where authorities may detect them.⁶⁵ Moreover, there is no comprehensive source of data on the number of unaccompanied children in these northbound mixed migratory movements and their migration behaviours and specific risks.⁶⁶ Existing data suggests that only a minority of children on the move seek to travel to North Africa and Europe.⁶⁷

Data collected for this study highlights key differences in migration patterns for children in the two locations, although children are consistently exposed to harm in both locations.

In Ouagadougou, key informants spoke of the prevalence of internal and regional migration for unaccompanied children, particularly among girls between 14 and 18 years old looking for employment as domestic workers.⁶⁸ Key informants also discussed male minors travelling for other work opportunities. For instance, a group of young males interviewed in Ouagadougou was travelling to work in gold panning sites in Mali. They reported that they had little financial means which forced them to sleep in bus stations as they transited. Half of them were planning to use the income from this work to fund their journeys towards Europe but said they had no information on the risks associated with the journey.

In Agadez, the study finds that children face multiple threats to their physical and psychological wellbeing while on the move in West Africa, particularly in the case of unaccompanied children without a familiar protective environment. Respondents relied on their parents or family to fund their journeys,⁶⁹ and on fellow migrants or members of a smuggling network to provide information and support.⁷⁰ Minors in the study sample therefore appear to be more at risk of abuse and lack of financial resources due to their dependence on the limited support available to them.

The lack of a protective environment may also lead to increased risk of exploitation or human trafficking. Organisations interviewed reported multiple cases of child trafficking linked to sex work and forced begging in both Ouagadougou and Agadez.⁷¹

⁶⁴ IOM/UNICEF (2017). More detailed literature review can be found at: IMREF (2019b), Interim Evidence Review.

⁶⁵ Save the Children (2018), [Protecting and Supporting Children on the Move](#); Save the Children (2017), [Young Invisible Enslaved: Children victims of trafficking and labour exploitation in Italy](#).

⁶⁶ Save the Children and MMC (2018), [Young and on the Move in West Africa](#).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ KI Action Sociale, Ouagadougou; KI IOM Ouagadougou; KI Ministry of Women, Ouagadougou. This is also reflected in UNICEF’s target populations for support for children along the CMR, with 53% beneficiaries from the host community, 29% internal migrants, 7% returnees, 5% outbound migrants in transit and 1% returning migrants in transit.

⁶⁹ 17-year-old male migrant from Guinea, interviewed in Agadez.

⁷⁰ 16-year-old male migrant from Guinea, interviewed in Agadez.

⁷¹ Field worker, International NGO, Agadez; Field worker, Local NGO, Agadez; Psychologist, Local NGO, Agadez.

2.2.3 Migrants with disabilities or chronic illnesses

Existing reports find that migrants with disabilities or chronic illnesses struggle to cope with harm that occurs during the journey.⁷² FGD participants, too, described how disabilities and chronic illnesses were reinforced by events in transit.

Transit migrants with chronic illnesses which require medical treatment faced risks related to the availability and costs of such treatments along the route (Box 9). A few migrants also reported stories of death due to the combination of abuse, disability and chronic diseases in later stages of the journey. For instance, a 31-year-old male migrant from Guinea, interviewed in Agadez, said that, when in Libya, he took a friend to the hospital to treat his chronic bone disease. There, the friend was handcuffed by the police and taken to a detention centre for deportees, where he passed away due to a lack of medical treatment for his disease and mistreatment by authorities.

Box 9: Asthmatic male migrant from Gabon 29, Interviewed in Ouagadougou

"I'm an asthmatic, and with travelling it's not easy. Once during the trip, we were sleeping on the floor and my asthma started; I had my box with me and I was able to cope. But, with the long journey the box is almost finished. Medication is very expensive here also, so I'm concerned I won't be able to afford the medicine."

2.3 Situational vulnerability in Ouagadougou and Agadez

Data from this study confirms that **many migrants become vulnerable as a result of journeying further along the CMR**. Forced returns and being stranded for protracted periods shaped all migrants' vulnerabilities in Ouagadougou and Agadez.

There are differences in the characteristics of the two study locations that shape the overall level of vulnerability in each location.

- **Stage in the route:** Ouagadougou is the first major transit hub for migrants from western Burkina Faso and neighbouring countries (e.g. Ghana, Togo, Benin and Cote d'Ivoire) on their way to Niger.⁷³ Agadez is a later transit hub on the CMR that directly connects the Sahel to Algeria and Libya.⁷⁴ Migrants who arrive in Ouagadougou are less likely to have experienced multiple instances of abuse.
- **Transportation contexts:** In Ouagadougou, migrants have easy access to bus transportation companies, reducing their dependence on smugglers and the associated vulnerabilities. Drivers and station managers interviewed in bus stations said that migrants from neighbouring countries tend to be familiar with the transportation system and are able to travel independently.⁷⁵ However, they also reported that some migrants, particularly from anglophone countries, tend to rely on facilitators who coordinate their journey. Migrants in these networks may use the same buses as those who travel independently. Nonetheless, reports of abuse from facilitators were rare – except for Nigerian women who may be brought to Ouagadougou and forced to engage in sex work.⁷⁶ In Agadez, on the contrary, there are no legal and easy-to-access means of transportation available for onward journeys.⁷⁷ Migrants who plan to head to North Africa join smuggling networks. Facilitators that migrants identify in migration hubs within the city introduce migrants to these networks, which are composed of ghetto owners and drivers. Alternatively, they remain within a network they joined at an earlier stage of the route. In both locations,

⁷² See for instance: OHCR (2019), [Migration & Disability. A View from Intersectionality](#); Danish Red Cross and Samuel Hall (2018), Migration Needs Assessment in Mali.

⁷³ Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime (2014), [Smuggled Futures: The dangerous path of the migrant from Africa to Europe.](#), p.11; UNU-MERIT, Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (2017), [Burkina Faso Migration Profile, Annex to the Study on Migration Routes in the East and Horn of Africa.](#)

⁷⁴ Clingendael (2018a), Migration in northern Mali: Conflict sensitivity analysis and protection needs assessment.

⁷⁵ KIs Sonef, Nour, Impérial Transport and Rombo Voyage.

⁷⁶ Aktis Strategy and Seefar (2017), From destination to transit? Irregular migrants from West Africa in Libya; Interviews with victims of trafficking in Ouagadougou, December 2019.

⁷⁷ Clingendael, (2017).

the literature suggests that young children and women are more likely to be in hidden smuggling and trafficking networks that avoid transit hubs.⁷⁸

- **Presence of returnees and stranded migrants:** In Ouagadougou, some returnees interviewed said they had been assisted by the IOM in northern Niger and had returned unassisted to Ouagadougou to earn money or to be introduced to new smugglers to engage in a new journey to North Africa. There is no data on the number of returnees who transit through or stay in Ouagadougou. Agadez is also characterised by a large presence of returnees and stranded migrants. After expulsion, migrants interviewed either choose to return to their place of origin with assistance from IOM, or to stay in Agadez to undertake another journey.
- **Political environment:** Sources suggest that Ouagadougou is characterised by a “laissez-faire” environment towards migration.⁷⁹ Recent data from the IOM suggests that a wider range of migrants from West Africa choose to transit via Ouagadougou on their way to Agadez via Niamey as a way to bypass escalating insecurity in Mali.⁸⁰ This may imply that the political context will evolve as a result of an increase in transit in Ouagadougou. On the other hand, smuggling networks in Agadez have reacted to the EU’s attempts to manage migration flows, causing further vulnerabilities for migrants trapped in those networks as they rely more heavily on smugglers and have less access to support. In Niger, one effect of the National Law 36-2015 intended to combat human smuggling is that smugglers take less-frequented and more dangerous routes through the desert to avoid detection by authorities.⁸¹ These pathways expose migrants to the harsh conditions of crossing the desert, higher fees⁸² and criminal gangs who may be working in collaboration with smugglers.⁸³ Interviews also revealed that drivers frequently abandon their passengers if they are followed by authorities.⁸⁴

Overall, evidence from this research suggests migrant levels of vulnerability tend to be lower in Ouagadougou when compared to Agadez (Figure 3). Events in transit create new vulnerabilities and amplify pre-existing characteristics and conditions among the mixed migrant populations in Agadez. Because of the presence of returnees and stranded migrants, however, vulnerabilities in Ouagadougou remain important to address.

⁷⁸ KI IOM, KI COOPI, KI Sultanate Agadez, FGD with women who had returned to Agadez after journeying to Algeria with a hidden network.

⁷⁹ Lama, K. (2011), [Politiques migratoires en Afrique de l'Ouest. Burkina Faso et Côte d'Ivoire](#); UNU-MERIT, Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (2017).

⁸⁰ IOM DTM Mali, December 2019.

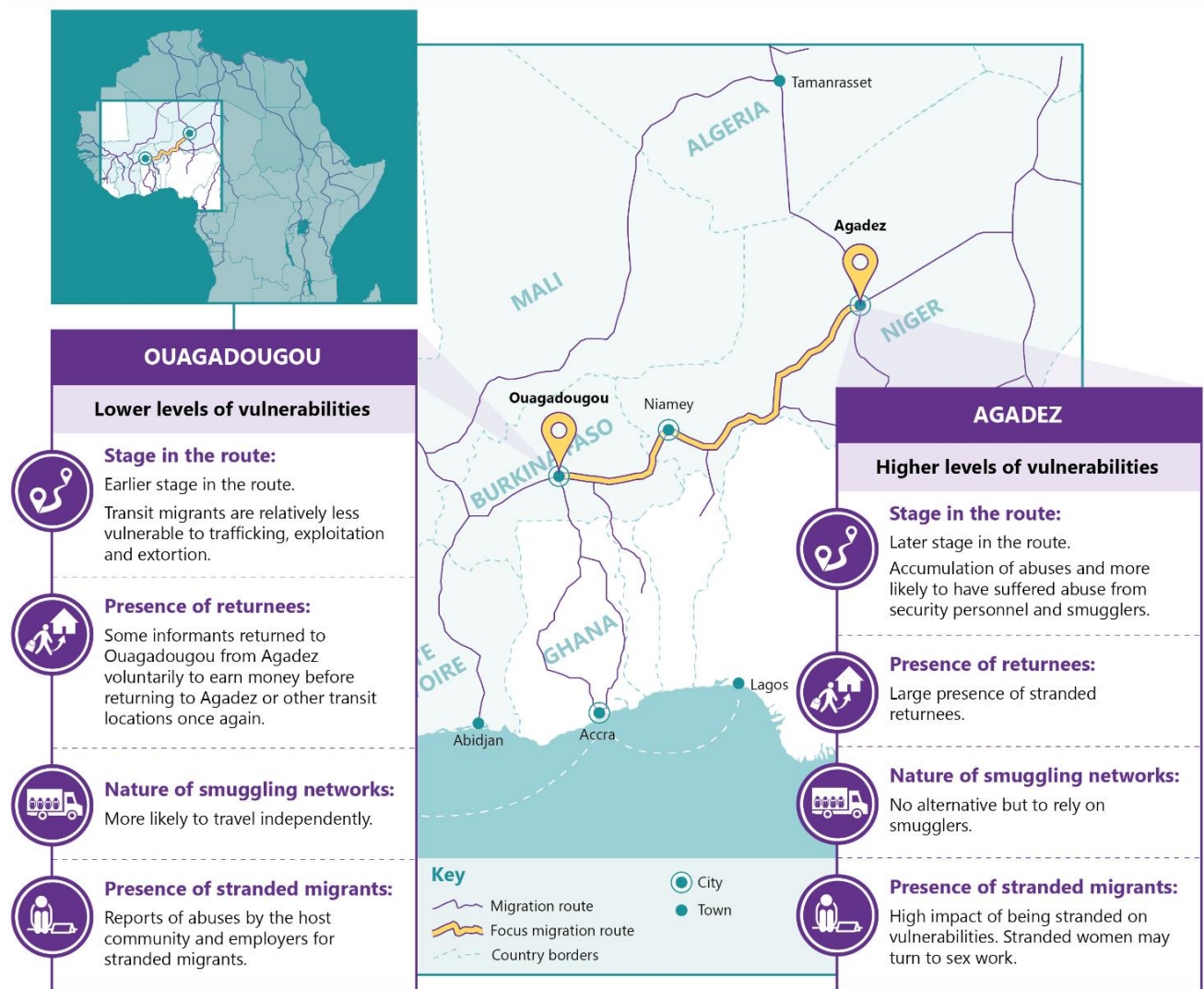
⁸¹ Recent research on this topic includes: Saferworld (2019), [Partners in Crime? The Impacts of Europe's Outsourced Migration Controls on Peace, Stability and Rights](#); Clingendael (2018b), [Multilateral Damage: The Impact of EU Migration Policies on Central Saharan Routes](#); GPP (2017), [Protection Fallout: How Increasing Capacity for Border Management Affects Migrants' Vulnerabilities in Niger and Mali](#).

⁸² GPPI (2017).

⁸³ KI; DRPE Agadez.

⁸⁴ This is reflected in IOM's Search and Rescue and Humanitarian Rescue Operations (HROs) activities: 3,408 people were rescued from January to March 2019, largely surpassing the objective of 1000.

Figure 3: Summary of vulnerabilities in Ouagadougou and Agadez



This has implications for who is likely to be vulnerable as a result of the journey, regardless of their personal characteristics.

- Migrants in Agadez who have had a longer transit journey before their arrival, or have been expelled from Libya or Algeria: As described in this section, migrants are less able to cope with financial, physical and mental stress as they travel for longer periods of time and face abuse from smugglers and authorities.
- Migrants who have been expelled from Libya or Algeria, and have voluntarily gone to Ouagadougou and Agadez to resume their journey: Expulsions create significant financial, mental and physical stress for migrants who are planning to resume their journeys.
- Migrants who are stranded in Ouagadougou and Agadez: For migrants who spend long periods of time in host communities without opportunities or a plan for integration, saving for their journey contributes to financial and mental stress. This is because stranded migrants are exposed to theft, violence or exploitation by local employers and communities, according to respondents.

3 Targeting vulnerable migrants

This section looks at how humanitarian and development organisations in Agadez and Ouagadougou target and reach vulnerable migrants in the two locations, with targeting referring to the “process by which individuals or groups are identified and selected for humanitarian assistance programmes, based on their needs and vulnerability.”⁸⁵

3.1 Models for targeting migrants

When targeting beneficiaries, organisations include and exclude groups based on their understanding of who needs support services the most or most urgently. In the case of SSS II, IPs determined their targeting approaches and specific target groups from the start of the programme.⁸⁶ For activities in Agadez and Ouagadougou, organisations use two targeting approaches:

- The first approach centres on the understanding that transit migrants are “by nature vulnerable” due to events that occur during the journey.⁸⁷ Within SSS II, Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Red Cross apply this approach. In the case of the Red Cross, their use of “service points” aligns with this approach: fixed and mobile support service points ensure that all vulnerable migrants in Ouagadougou and Agadez are able to access critical humanitarian assistance.⁸⁸ Efforts to ensure the most vulnerable migrants access services is guided by a list of vulnerability criteria – based on the AMiRA (Action for Migrants: Route-based Assistance) project – which guides field teams and allows for identifying and accessing particularly vulnerable sub-groups. These criteria relate to personal factors (e.g. age, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, health) and situational factors (e.g. lack of shelter). Organisations adopting this approach nonetheless aim to make support services available to all transit migrants without distinction. They invest in disseminating information about their services and in field presence at key migrant hubs.⁸⁹
- The second approach is determined by the programme’s and organisation’s mandate. It focuses on specific groups in transit (unaccompanied minors and SGBV victims) or specific groups that may not be in transit towards North Africa and Europe (vulnerable children travelling internally or regionally). Organisations such as IOM (focus on Victims of Trafficking and migrants who accept a return package via the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme), IRC (SGBV victims) and UNICEF (children) follow this approach. Organisation adopting this approach rely on referrals from formal and informal partners and are present at key migrant hubs.

Successful targeting is closely tied to access strategies and the ability to identify migrants in places they transit and live, either to access them directly or to find ways that ensure migrants receive information on the services available to them.

3.2 Monitoring vulnerabilities

Interviews indicate that organisations assess and monitor overall levels of vulnerability in transit hubs or at specific stages on the route to adapt activities (second targeting approach) and to increase focus on specific vulnerable sub-groups (first targeting approach). For instance, in Burkina Faso, AMiRA is increasingly focusing on reaching sex workers and pregnant women.⁹⁰ However, there is no evidence that field staff use emerging data to better screen vulnerable migrants from an emerging caseload.

⁸⁵ Smith, G., Mohiddin, L. & Phelps, L. (2017), [Targeting in Urban Displacement Contexts](#).

⁸⁶ Proposals to SSS II.

⁸⁷ KIs, AMiRA Ouagadougou.

⁸⁸ IFRC (2018). [Humanitarian Service Points. Summary Brief](#).

⁸⁹ KI AMiRA Ouagadougou. The Red Cross seeks to access transit migrants who are travelling overland on their own, migrants in smuggling networks, stranded migrants, migrants in detention and migrants in brothels. Volunteers provide information to all migrants that they identify in migration hubs such as busses or bus terminal, provide first physical and mental health response, and refer them to other service providers as appropriate.

⁹⁰ KI AMiRA, Ouagadougou.

According to KIs, humanitarian and development actors use both formal and informal data collection mechanisms to monitor and assess the evolution of vulnerabilities in Agadez and Ouagadougou:

- Formal sources include data collected by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), the MMC's Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi), and protection monitoring assessments. Other formal sources include aggregated data collected as part of individual case management (e.g. health cards provided to beneficiaries by the Red Cross in Burkina Faso).
- Informal sources include direct communications between management and field staff, such as DTM and MMC monitors or Red Cross National Society volunteers.

Coordination also appears to play a key role in monitoring vulnerabilities. During monthly coordination meetings for SSS II, or in protection clusters, organisations explained that they share their latest assessments and new trends observed by field staffs, and discuss how these affect their work.⁹¹ In some cases, 4Mi or DTM staff present their latest data.

In general, interviews indicate that senior management staff use the results generated by these formal and informal tools in making decisions to flex activities, with two additional caveats:

- Organisations did not usually use the data from DTM and 4Mi for direct adaptation of targeting strategies and activities, given the time delay between data collection and publication of the data.⁹²
- Analysis of aggregated data happens through dashboards or needs to be undertaken by information management staff – in the case of the latter, respondents noted that the data were analysed at a later stage of the programme, with limited opportunity for adaptation.

Where vulnerability monitoring takes place, it does not usually seek to predict changes. Informants generally agree that organisations do not have the ability to predict the consequences of changes along the route on vulnerabilities at given points, and to adapt their targeting strategies and activities accordingly.⁹³

3.3 Efforts to improve vulnerability assessment and targeting

Currents efforts to improve vulnerability assessments mostly consist of piloting non-static definitions of vulnerability, and improving referrals of potentially vulnerable migrants.

Interviewees highlighted that organisations are increasingly moving away from checklist-type vulnerability assessments towards more non-static definitions to integrate the personal and situational conditions discussed in the previous section.⁹⁴ For example, the "IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse", published in 2019, uses the Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability (DoMV) model. The DoMV acknowledges that individuals are "situated within a household, a community and a country", which may limit their ability to "avoid, resist, cope with, or recover from risks or experiences of violence, exploitation, or abuse that they are exposed to or experience within a migration context". This approach highlights personal characteristics (including resources), and the context through which migrants travel. IOM informants highlighted the DoMV model as an emerging good practice. However, this study cannot analyse whether or how it could be replicated by other partners because of limited lessons learned at the time of writing – the DoMV is not applied in Agadez and Ouagadougou and is currently piloted in other contexts. IOM field staff indicated that they expect significant challenges in applying the DoMV, such as identifying vulnerabilities rapidly when faced with large caseloads, or with highly mobile migrants who are not willing to answer time-consuming questionnaires.⁹⁵

Most organisations report that improved referrals between actors providing assistance has helped to target vulnerable migrants in Agadez and Ouagadougou. In mixed migration settings, vulnerable groups may travel

⁹¹ Coordination meeting notes, Protection cluster Agadez; SSS II coordination group Ouagadougou.

⁹² KI NGO Consortium, KI IOM, KI AMiRA.

⁹³ KI AMiRA, KI IRC.

⁹⁴ KI AMiRA Ouagadougou, KI IOM Agadez, KI IOM Ouagadougou

⁹⁵ KI Field staff, IOM, Ouagadougou.

with other migrants that do not fall under the target group of an organisation first in contact with the migrant. As reported by many organisations, referrals by others allowed them to identify their target when unable to be present at key transit points. Effective referrals require a clear and common understanding among field workers of who can be referred to what organisation.⁹⁶ In Agadez and Ouagadougou, organisations have started developing referral pathways that outline the target groups of each organisation and the services they provide, along with contact numbers that field workers can use. Organisations developed these referral pathways in the context of ongoing coordination mechanisms between organisations that provide assistance to migrants. However, significant practical gaps remain, as outlined in the next sub-section.

3.4 Challenges in targeting

Organisations face a range of conceptual and practical challenges when targeting migrants in Agadez and Ouagadougou.

Organisations rely on the “first look”, which does not allow them to spot some vulnerabilities.

Respondents highlighted the nature of transit migration on the CMR as a key challenge in targeting migrants. Transit migrants are highly mobile and aim to move forward to the next leg of their journey as soon as they are able to.⁹⁷ As a result, organisations are more likely to rely on “the first look”⁹⁸ to screen or spot vulnerable migrants. Informants involved in first response (community mobilisers, volunteers and local authorities) reported that they struggle to spot vulnerabilities that were invisible, or that migrants actively sought to hide, or have no apparent incentive to share information about. For instance, LGBTQI-identifying individuals have no incentive to identify themselves as such, unless they apply for asylum with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or in Europe. This is also a challenge for organisations that receive referrals where some migrants that would fall under their targeting may have not been identified by first responders.

Some KIs noted limited coordination between organisations at migration hubs, which limits the effectiveness of referral networks.

Due to resource constraints, organisations cannot be present at migration hubs for all migrant arrivals or returns. This is especially true in Ouagadougou, where arrivals are constant throughout the day. All field workers interviewed reported that there was little coordination between organisations to determine the days and hours of visiting bus stations. Field workers said they were also not fully familiar with the mandates of all organisations, that phone numbers in referral pathways did not work, and that other organisations may not accept referrals due to lack of funds.⁹⁹ This created significant gaps in targeting through referrals.¹⁰⁰

Organisations raised concerns about whether it makes sense for programmes to primarily target migrants travelling northwards to Europe, given the large-scale needs of other populations in these areas.

It is unclear to key informants whether they distribute existing resources effectively to those who need them most in transit hubs. In Ouagadougou, humanitarian organisations were particularly concerned that Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) had been deprioritised as a result of the focus on transit migrants. Likewise, they highlighted that migrants engaged in regional, circular and internal migration are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and abuse.¹⁰¹ In Agadez, local authorities often noted that humanitarian actors neglect to support vulnerable members of the host community.¹⁰² In some cases, organisations adapted targets to include host communities who are judged equally or more vulnerable than transit migrants in terms of SGBV.¹⁰³ The SSS II programme does not necessarily exclude stranded migrants, regional migrants or host communities.

⁹⁶ KI Field staff IOM, Agadez; TdH Ouagadougou; Red Cross Ouagadougou; Coopi Agadez.

⁹⁷ This is discussed further in section 4.1.2.

⁹⁸ KI Field staff, SSS II, Ouagadougou.

⁹⁹ KIs field staffs, Ouagadougou and Agadez.

¹⁰⁰ KI AMiRA Ouagadougou; KI TdH Ouagadougou.

¹⁰¹ KI AMiRA; INTRAC Learning Update.

¹⁰² KI IRC Agadez.

¹⁰³ KI IRC Agadez; KI Red Cross Niamey.

4 Accessing vulnerable migrants

Data collected for this study show that humanitarian and development actors face challenges when trying to access transit migrant populations and the most vulnerable groups or individuals among them. This section reviews factors that inhibit access to vulnerable migrants in Ouagadougou and Agadez, and outlines what these imply for understanding which migrants organisations are currently not reaching.

4.1 Inhibiting factors

Challenges in accessing migrants stemmed from both organisations' strategies and migrants' ability and willingness to access services.¹⁰⁴ This section reviews factors that inhibit access to vulnerable migrants in Ouagadougou and Agadez, and outlines what these imply for understanding which migrants organisations are currently not reaching.

4.1.1 Migrants may not be aware of SSS II services

Informants suggested that most organisations in Ouagadougou and Agadez are proactive in approaching migrants to offer services and provide first response. To do so, they hire community mobilisers, volunteers and social workers who regularly visit migration hubs (bus stations, neighbourhoods with a higher percentage of migrants) within the cities. In Ouagadougou, community mobilisers, volunteers and social workers go to bus stations, neighbourhoods with a higher percentage of migrants and community shelters led by migrant associations. In Agadez, they visit bus stations, neighbourhoods with a higher percentage of migrants, ghettos and, in some cases, brothels.

However, informants identified as a key challenge the likelihood of targeted migrants not knowing i) that services exist, or ii) which services are available to them. KIIs suggested that organisations are not able to cover all migration hubs fully in light of the constant flow of arrivals and departures. Instead, they often rely on referrals from other organisations, from government services and informal actors – including community shelters and members of smuggling networks – to identify vulnerable migrants. They also rely on migrants approaching them spontaneously to access their services.

Although organisations aim to be visible so migrants can approach them in times of need,¹⁰⁵ security issues have resulted in limited visibility for organisations, particularly in Ouagadougou. Red Cross volunteers reported that, following a significant security incident in 2018, the organisation adopted a low profile and could not openly wear Red Cross branding in bus stations. This resulted in migrants not being aware that they could approach the Red Cross.

In light of referral challenges and limited visibility, organisations have sought to improve information-sharing about services at earlier stages on the route.

However, there is mixed feedback from FGD participants regarding the availability of information about services along the route (Box 10). Among informants, the migrants who had less information about organisations were:

- Migrants at earlier stages on the route, having spent less time in transit. Few departing migrants in Ouagadougou were aware of organisations that can provide services to them, and those who had arrived recently to Agadez were unaware that services were available to them.

Box 10: Visibility in the field

29-year-old male migrant from Ivory Coast, interviewed in Agadez: *"[Humanitarian actors] are not visible in the field. Sometimes we don't know whether we can reach them or where to find them. That's why we don't go to them."*

29-year-old male migrant from Cameroon, interviewed in Agadez: *"Each NGO has its own system – meaning each one has its criteria for who they can help and how. It's confusing."*

¹⁰⁴ OCHA (2010), *What is humanitarian access?*

¹⁰⁵ See IMREF (2020), *Interrogating the Route-Based Approach*. Unpublished.

- Migrants who travelled alone. A migrant from Benin in Ouagadougou said he was forced to live in the street for a month before finding out via a compatriot that he could be supported by IOM for voluntary return.

Even when migrants knew of humanitarian and development organisations, some were unsure what services were available to them, and how to approach organisations in case of need. This discouraged them from approaching organisations, especially in light of the risks they identify for themselves in doing so.

4.1.2 Migrants may not want to access services due to lack of trust in organisations

Some migrants journeying northward said they were unwilling to access assistance. The qualitative sample confirms that migrants' priority is often to continue the journey, even if that leads to dependencies on smugglers and reduced resources, and puts them in harm's way.¹⁰⁶ As a result, migrants themselves can function as inhibitors of access if they feel that such services will impede their onward journey.¹⁰⁷ Migrants who are not beneficiaries of SSS II programmes in Ouagadougou and Agadez expressed that they do not want to access formal humanitarian assistance, even when needed. Instead, they prefer to rely on smugglers, other migrants, and their families. This issue is widely recognised by humanitarian organisations interviewed in Ouagadougou and Agadez.¹⁰⁸ Yet, participants in the Annual Learning Forum and some organisations in Ouagadougou and Agadez agree that the lack of trust of migrants who are actively avoiding organisations is not included in current strategies.

Unwillingness to access services was often due to lack of trust linked to returns. Many migrants expressed concerns that if they access humanitarian services, they will be forced to return to their place of origin – either by the police or IOM, thereby thwarting their migration plans. Some migrants in the sample specifically expressed fear that they would be forced to return if they accessed organisations that provide voluntary return, or organisations that collaborate with those who provide voluntary returns. Those migrants concluded that all humanitarian actors promoted return and should be avoided unless they wanted to return. This suggests that, to some extent, existing misperceptions of return spill over to other humanitarian organisations in Ouagadougou and Agadez – even when they are not involved in voluntary return.¹⁰⁹

Box 11: Fear of forced return

KI Transport Station Manager Ouagadougou: *"The first time the Red Cross agents came to me saying they're there to identify migrants and help them. At first, I thought it was a real help, but later some migrants came back from IOM telling me that they had been told to return and stop their journey. Migrants do not trust them. They were astonished that they are being offered to return."*

34-year-old male migrant from Senegal, Ouagadougou: *"Yes, there are people who don't trust IOM because they say that when you go to IOM they will spoil your papers so that you can't travel, there are many things that I heard."*

27-year-old male migrant from Senegal, interviewed in Agadez: *"If you're seen with a backpack, the police will arrest you in the street, then call IOM to make you go home."*

Ghetto owner, Agadez: *"Migrants don't want to be seen by NGOs so they are not returned home. That's why they're hiding."*

Furthermore, low levels of trust were shaped by perceptions that humanitarian organisations work closely with authorities. Most migrants expressed mistrust of the authorities due to abuses by police and

¹⁰⁶ Clingendael (2018a), *Migration in northern Mali: Conflict sensitivity analysis and protection needs assessment*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ KI AMiRA, KI IOM, KI MDM.

¹⁰⁹ IMREF asked FGD participants "Do you know anyone here who can help migrants? Who? Can migrants access them? Why not?". Enumerators did not ask participants about specific organisations. Out of 136 interviewees, about twenty migrants directly mentioned concerns that they would be forced to return to their home country, even if they were travelling legally within the ECOWAS. Most of those who voice this opinion are young men who are not beneficiaries of services. The lack of trust is also mentioned by some KIs, notably KI Senior Management IRC Niamey; KI field staff AMiRA Ouagadougou.

border authorities. Some migrants said they choose to hide and only approach organisations once they decide that they are willing to return. One 19-year-old male migrant from the Gambia, interviewed in Agadez, explained that he preferred to stay hidden in houses and ghettos throughout his journey because he did not want “the police to catch [me] and take me to IOM or the authorities to force me to return.”

The perception that organisations were often unable to provide the services migrants actually need also reduced migrants’ willingness to approach them, especially in light of the perceived risks to their migratory plan. Migrants sometimes explained that organisations would approach them but not provide the help that they need. Migrants who voiced this opinion often referred to their needs in terms of shelter, or direct assistance to cross the desert to Algeria and Libya, which many felt was lacking.¹¹⁰

4.1.3 Migrants may be hidden by smugglers

Migrants increasingly rely on smugglers once they arrive in Agadez and smugglers become one of the key actors for a journey onward to Libya or Algeria. **At the same time, smugglers also act as gatekeepers, enabling or inhibiting organisations’ access to migrants and migrants’ access to services.** Informants reported that along the CMR some smugglers have increased prices, actively avoid transit hubs, and provide protection services to migrants as part of their package.¹¹¹ Recent research similarly finds that smugglers act as inhibitors of access, encouraging migrants to remain inside the network, including in ghettos and safe houses.¹¹²

However, recent research in Gao suggests that some smugglers will facilitate access to migrants if given financial incentives to do so.¹¹³ This study finds similar cases of smugglers referring vulnerable migrants to humanitarian actors. Some KIIs also associated this type of interaction with smugglers with ethical risks for the respective organisation as a whole and its reputation in the field, including with a view to the host communities.¹¹⁴

There is evidence to suggest gatekeeping by smugglers has increased, meaning that smugglers limit general access to migrants more than before the beginning of increased programming in 2015-2016. Some field workers interviewed for this study reported that they found smugglers are “increasingly suspicious” as a result of uncoordinated, regular visits from a range of actors in the ghettos.¹¹⁵ Those suspicions are reinforced by the hostile environment towards migrants and migrant transportation. Smugglers interviewed said they feared that engaging with humanitarian organisations could make them vulnerable to a government crackdown and that they would be sent to jail due to visible cooperation between humanitarian organisations and the government. This has led smugglers to take alternative routes outside of Agadez, or to operate clandestinely within Agadez for fear of arrests.¹¹⁶

4.2 Access strategies

In humanitarian displacement contexts, organisations build trust with communities through direct and sustained engagement with community members and including them in targeting and providing feedback on services provided.¹¹⁷ Organisations considered this approach as ineffective for reaching migrants travelling to North Africa who are highly mobile, may be in clandestine networks, or may not want to be accessed while travelling.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁰ This was notably discussed by migrants in FGD26, FGD29, and FGD38.

¹¹¹ KI local organisation, Agadez; KI IRC Agadez.

¹¹² Clingendael (2019b), [Southbound Mixed Movement to Niger: An analysis of changing dynamics and policy responses](#).

¹¹³ Clingendael (2017).

¹¹⁴ KIs NGO Consortium, KIs AMiRA, KI MDM.

¹¹⁵ KII COOPI, KII IRC.

¹¹⁶ “Between mid-2016 and April 2018, Niger’s security forces arrested more than 282 drivers, car owners, ‘coaxers’ (intermediaries) and ‘ghetto’ owners housing migrants, and confiscated 300 to 350 vehicles, in Agadez and on the road to Libya.” (Clingendael, 2018b) Interviews with DRPE and IOM in Agadez suggests that migrants increasingly use alternative routes around Agadez.

¹¹⁷ See for instance: ICRC. 2018. [Statement: we must listen and act, not impose](#). This reflects insights by IPs during the IMREF Annual Learning Workshop, 2020.

¹¹⁸ Insights shared by IPs during the IMREF Annual Learning Workshop, 2020. See also IFRC (2020), [The trust deficit in humanitarian action – does going local address it?](#)

Informants explained that organisations have developed alternative access strategies to address these challenges, including building networks at migration intersections, working with local migrant associations, and engaging with smugglers.

4.2.1 Building networks at migration intersections

Informants generally considered building networks at migration intersections to be good practice.¹¹⁹ To build these networks along the CMR and reach vulnerable and highly mobile migrants, organisations in Ouagadougou and Agadez rely on volunteers and community mobilisers. They visit bus stations, community sites, shelters, mosques and churches.¹²⁰

Key informants considered bus station workers a key group to reach migrants in Ouagadougou or on the way to Agadez. Organisations expected that these workers could support in the identification, referral and assistance of vulnerable migrants. Bus station workers usually received phone numbers to contact humanitarian organisations, and some received training on how to recognise signs of vulnerability.¹²¹ However, this may also create issues around trust. For instance, a bus driver interviewed in Ouagadougou said that migrants were increasingly unwilling to share their travel plans, or speak to the driver, for fear of being arrested. This was particularly the case for minors from 15 to 17 years old.¹²²

Field workers also reported that they provide non-financial incentives to engage further with bus station workers. In many cases, bus station workers request financial incentives to provide support and refer cases. As an alternative, the Red Cross has used first aid training to engage with transportation actors. This strategy makes it possible to identify focal points who can help access the most vulnerable, while providing an alternative incentive.

Some respondents pointed to community members who may sometimes play an active role in detection of vulnerable persons, particularly minors. In Ouagadougou and Agadez, state social workers funded by UNICEF said they rely on referrals from community members to identify children on the move “who are lost”.¹²³ However, a side effect of increased investment in migrant protection is very strongly voiced frustration from host communities and local authorities, particularly in Agadez where support is more visible.¹²⁴

All key informants find that the strategies on the whole have improved access because there are increasing numbers of referrals. Especially through volunteers and community mobilisers, respondents overall agreed that they receive more referrals and are better able to provide first psychosocial and health support as well as information on risks related to the journey to transit migrants before they leave for their next destination, and to raise awareness on voluntary return packages.

The network and referral strategies also improved organisations’ ability to access individuals with specific personal characteristics as mobilisers have high familiarity with local dynamics. For instance, in Ouagadougou, the Red Cross reported that they had been able to access women who engage in sex work in local bars thanks to a volunteer who was familiar with this group.

However, field workers considered the lack of coordination amongst mobilisers from various organisations a challenge. Field staffs, in particular community mobilisers and volunteers, highlight a lack of coordination among organisations in migration hubs within Ouagadougou and Agadez. They explained that organisations have different targets and may send mobilisers to bus stations and ghettos on the same day, causing duplication in migration intersections, and in engaging with smugglers.

¹¹⁹ KI UNICEF, KI IRC, KI IOM.

¹²⁰ Notably UNICEF, the Red Cross and IOM in Ouagadougou; UNICEF, the Red Cross, IOM, MDM and COOPI in Agadez. This practice supports a continuum of care along which strengthens the capacity of formal and informal actors at key points of the migration route in order to ensure continuity of a “protection chain everywhere children on the move are to be found.” Terre des Hommes, [The Added Value of Protective Accompaniment](#), 2014.

¹²¹ IOM Narrative Report, 2019; KI IOM Ouagadougou.

¹²² KI Station Manager Ouagadougou, KI .

¹²³ KII, DRPE Agadez; KI UNICEF Agadez.

¹²⁴ KI Local authority, Agadez.

4.2.2 Migrant associations in Ouagadougou

In Ouagadougou, migrant associations or shelters play a key role in providing assistance and referrals to migrants. The Red Cross has developed strategies to engage with associations of foreign nationals (Malian, Togo, Ivory Coast, Senegal) so they can make referrals when needed. Focus group participants were familiar with the “Senegalese House” which hosts migrants from Senegal and other countries in the region (Box 11).

Evidence from data collected suggests that engagement with formal and informal migrant associations is effective for referrals and passing information to highly mobile migrants. Multiple IOM beneficiaries interviewed by IMREF in Ouagadougou had heard of AVRR options through the Senegalese House. This mirrors past research on child migrants in East Africa that found that “peer support” is effective for communicating information about the risks of migration and self-protection because migrants trust families and communities.¹²⁵

However, interviews with migrant associations suggest that there is a need for sustained engagement and clear expectations of what can be done after referrals. In particular, the manager of the Senegalese House reported that an organisation had started to give medication to people staying in the house but stopped distributions shortly after. In response, the manager stopped calling this organisation for referrals.

Box 11: 36-year-old male Senegal interviewed in Maison des Sénégalais, Ouagadougou

“There is a house of [a well-known] marabout. He has built a big house for foreigners to stay in... When you come, you ask for his house, people will show you there, even the taxis will take you there.”

4.2.3 Engagement with smugglers in Agadez

There are anecdotes of smugglers referring vulnerable migrants to, and engaging with, humanitarian actors. To ensure that they can identify and access the most vulnerable migrants in smuggling networks, humanitarian organisations engage smugglers by visiting them in accessible ghettos.¹²⁶

It is **unclear which strategies are most effective at incentivising smugglers to refer vulnerable migrants.** According to informants, the motivations of members of the smuggling network are primarily financial in nature¹²⁷ but organisations are reluctant to engage in cash exchanges with smugglers. Some have therefore piloted alternatives.¹²⁸ Médecins du Monde (MDM) provides food kits to smugglers, which they assess as a good practice because it eases the relationship with smugglers. The Red Cross provides first aid training and envisages providing first aid certificates to those actors as a meaningful alternative.

Past research suggests that there was a need to adapt a well-defined access strategy to each actor within smuggling networks, based on detailed knowledge of the context and “each actors’ incentives, interests, and needs”.¹²⁹ Some informants suggested that organisations have not undertaken this process in Agadez before engaging with smugglers, with multiple field workers accessing ghettos with different messages that may create further confusion and break trust.¹³⁰

4.3 Migrants not reached

Based on interviews with transit migrants and field workers, two factors determine who is not reached in the transit hubs of Agadez and Ouagadougou: detection challenges (Section 3.4) and access challenges (Section 4.1).

Informants involved in first assistance response (community mobilisers, volunteers and local authorities) raised detection challenges as critical. Key informants reported that they struggle to spot vulnerabilities that were not

¹²⁵ Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2019), *Young and on the Move, Children and youth in mixed migration flows within and from the Horn of Africa*.

¹²⁶ KI AMiRA, KI IOM, KI NGO Consortium, KI MDM.

¹²⁷ KI Red Cross Agadez. Reflected in Clingendael 2018a.

¹²⁸ KI Red Cross Agadez, KI Coopi Agadez.

¹²⁹ Clingendael (2018a), *Migration in northern Mali: Conflict sensitivity analysis and protection needs assessment*.

¹³⁰ KI Field Staff Agadez; KI Field staff IOM; KI Senior Management IRC.

immediately visible, or that migrants actively sought to hide. Some also said they struggle to detect vulnerabilities that derive from situational factors such as trauma from expulsions (Section 1). Moreover, they may detect vulnerable migrants but assess that they cannot refer them to another organisation due to coverage gaps or weak service provision.¹³¹

Summarising insights from KIIs and FGD participants, the following groups are not systematically detected:

- SGBV survivors: Some survivors interviewed in Agadez said they had been approached by government social workers but not referred to humanitarian organisations for assistance support.
- LGBQI-identifying individuals: Partners reported that many have no incentive to identify themselves to organisations, unless they are seeking asylum.
- Underaged youth (i.e. children aged 16-17): Those interviewed in Ouagadougou reported that they had not been approached by organisations in bus stations, despite sleeping there outdoors while waiting for their families to send them money. This may be because first response providers did not recognise that they were children, and therefore not eligible for support.

FGDs and KIIs also underline access challenges, with migrants not knowing about support services or where to access them, not wanting to access services, or being held in smuggling networks with no possibility to access services.

- Most migrants who are planning to continue their journeys reported that they often actively avoid organisations because of fears of being returned, despite suffering from financial losses, physical and mental health-related vulnerabilities.
- Informants reported that transit migrants connected to smuggling networks are sometimes pressured by smugglers to actively encourage other migrants to avoid international organisations, or to take alternative routes where they fall outside of transit hubs' sphere of programming.
- Young children and women may be in hidden smuggling and trafficking networks with no access to transit hubs. In Agadez, field teams were unable to identify ghettos with unaccompanied younger children and women with children. Evidence suggests that those groups are particularly vulnerable to harm and should be prioritised in target and access plans.
- Women exploited for sex work are equally hard to reach. In Agadez, neighbourhoods and locations of brothels are well known, but brothel owners rarely allow access. In Ouagadougou, migrant women working in local bars and restaurants also engage in sex work to fund their onward journeys. In the latter case, the main challenge is detection rather than access.
- Informants also reported that they had not always been able to negotiate access to migrants in temporary detention and jail, both in Agadez and in Ouagadougou. Places that migrants are not allowed to leave freely, notably jails and brothels, further constrained access. While some organisations have negotiated access to jails or brothels, this is not systematic, and access may be lost if there is a change of staff as it often relies on personal relationships.¹³²

As highlighted by the SSS II Business Plan,¹³³ IPs focused primarily on migrants heading to North Africa and Europe. The study finds that there are significant challenges in reaching these migrants. In earlier stages of the journey such as Ouagadougou, migrants are not willing to access services as they fear they will be forced to interrupt their journeys. In latter stages of the journey, migrants have no alternative but to use smuggling networks. This raises critical questions around the feasibility of reaching those migrants, and the extent to which the programme is likely to do so.

¹³¹ KI Field Staff Niamey.

¹³² KI Senior Management AMiRA, Ouagadougou and Agadez; KII Field Staff TdH.

¹³³ SSS II Project Purpose: "To make migration safer and more orderly and provide critical humanitarian support, resulting in fewer deaths and less suffering along migration routes towards Europe," in "African transit routes towards the central Mediterranean migration routes"

5 Conclusion & recommendations

This study examined migrant vulnerabilities in Agadez and Ouagadougou. It identified practices and existing gaps in targeting and accessing vulnerable transit migrants in those two transit hubs.

Key findings of the study highlighted that:

- Vulnerabilities of migrants relate to pre-existing personal characteristics and situational factors along the journey, that are closely interlinked in shaping migrants' vulnerabilities. This suggests that both personal and situational vulnerabilities should be considered when defining and responding to vulnerability. This type of approach is already being rolled out by organisations such as IOM with the DoMV model.
- Migrants become increasingly vulnerable as they spent more time stranded, en route along the CMR, and upon return. This suggests that the types of services need to evolve along the route, in line with the scale of the investment. Engaging at different points of the route remains important to provide services to stranded migrants and vulnerable regional migrants, as well as to help migrants prepare for risks along a migration journey.
- Actors first in touch with new migrant arrivals (e.g. community mobilisers, volunteers and local authorities) reported that they struggle to spot less visible vulnerabilities, and that migrants often actively sought to hide certain vulnerabilities. Some also said they struggle to detect less visible vulnerabilities that derive from situational factors (e.g. trauma due to deportations from North Africa). As a result, this leads to targeting gaps.
- Coordination between organisations at migration hubs is not always effective and appears to create challenges for targeting when coupled with inefficient referral pathways.
- Changes in the policy context can significantly affect migrant vulnerabilities and programme implementers and donors need to consider these carefully when developing strategies for targeting and accessing vulnerable migrants. For instance, smuggling networks in Agadez have reacted to attempts by the EU and other partners to manage migration flows, causing further vulnerabilities for migrants trapped in those networks as they rely more heavily on smugglers and have less access to support.
- Many migrants are not willing to access services provided by humanitarian organisations due to perceptions that they will be forced or pushed to return to their country of origin. Lack of trust in humanitarian actors severely limits transit migrants' uptake of available services on the CMR. This suggests that clear strategies are needed to build greater trust with transit migrants. Working with migrant associations and volunteers appears to be a promising practice for reaching vulnerable migrants but there is a need for more sustained engagement.
- All organisations that provide services to transit migrants engage with smugglers to identify vulnerable migrants. However, there is no consensus on how to engage and mobilise smugglers to access vulnerable migrants and how to prevent potential ethical concerns. The lack of coordination among organisations in Agadez has meanwhile led to suspicions among smugglers who are actively hiding migrants from organisations.

Drawing from these findings and implications, tables 3 and 4 provide recommendations to implementing organisations and donors respectively.

5.1 Recommendations to IPs

Table 3: Recommendations to IPs

Gap in service provision	Recommendations
<p>Lack of clarity around targeting and access strategies creates a risk that the programme is not reaching vulnerable groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop clear vulnerability criteria for different programming hubs to define which groups the programme understands to be the most vulnerable. • Develop access strategies for reaching different types of vulnerable migrants. This could draw on a stakeholder mapping exercise for key programming hubs to identify entry-points for reaching different vulnerable migrants. For instance, for migrants in jail, this could include local paralegals, rights organisations, or intermediaries with access to jails. • Use Research, Analysis, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (RAMEL) to identify who the programme is not reaching and adapt strategies. This can be done by adapting RAMEL tools to capture information on different vulnerabilities, and integrating this information into learning strategies – for instance, add as a standing item at learning fora (e.g. monthly meetings, programme reviews, learning workshops).
<p>First responders struggle to detect vulnerable migrants because they have to rely on the “first look” at migration intersections. More complex models of targeting are likely to run into challenges being implemented in the field.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train field workers on identifying a wider range of vulnerabilities, regardless of their organisation’s specific mandate, and specifically with a view to identifying vulnerabilities less visible at a first look. This would allow for not leaving vulnerable migrants behind and improving referrals to relevant actors following detection and first contact with migrants. • Opportunities for shared training courses include ongoing trainings for the Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability (DoMV) organised by the IOM.
<p>Lack of coordination and/or clear messaging in key migration hubs leads to ineffective referrals. First responders lack information about the services other organisations provide or the targeting criteria used by all organisations. This also appears to contribute to misconceptions that may create suspicions among migrants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a shared strategy and coordination plan through existing Migration Protection Working Groups. This strategy should include, at a minimum: i) a mapping of visits in key migration intersections, ii) clear referral pathways, iii) common procedures for sharing research and analysis, detection of vulnerabilities, approach to smuggling actors, local government, and local organisations (including migrant associations), and iv) a strategy on building trust with key actors. • Map referral pathways and share targeting criteria for each organisation, so that referrals can be effective. This can be done by hosting a workshop that brings together all relevant actors. • Nominate a single actor that could be in charge of screening migrants in main transit intersections; leading referral processes; and staying updated on new actors, target groups and changes in focal points within organisations.
<p>Tools to monitor and understand vulnerabilities are not being used to adapt targeting strategies and to adapt associated access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a regular process for updating vulnerability criteria and making it a living document. Define: i) sources for monitoring vulnerabilities; ii) process for reviewing targeting; iii) roles and responsibilities within the process; iv) a timeframe. For instance, this process could be integrated into (bi-)annual programme reviews.

<p>strategies to the most vulnerable migrants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could take place through an organisation that acts as focal point for the rest of the area coordination platform, or through an independent coordination team co-funded by all organisations with Research, Analysis, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (RAMEL) capacity. • Use contextual analysis to identify scenarios and related mitigation strategies or programmatic adaptations which can be quickly implemented if required. A good example is the Emergency Plan of Action implemented by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and a range of national Red Cross societies. The IFRC adapts its response depending on weekly reports from local staff at the border and regularly re-develops scenario planning of future contextual changes.¹³⁴
<p>Migrants appear to lack trust in humanitarian actors and local governments amid fears of being returned. In part, this is due to misperceptions that organisations force migrants to return.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing coordination platforms to organise day-to-day coverage at bus stations, ghettos, and key neighbourhoods to clearly communicate available support assistance by different aid organisations and to prevent misconceptions and misinformation that may create suspicions among migrants. IPs should also consider joint visits in migrant hubs to inform audiences about the entire range of support services available and inform migrants about the organisations' impartiality and voluntariness of AVRR. • When implementing programmes jointly or in coordination with the local government, consider whether public entities are perceived as neutral and well-intentioned by migrants.
<p>In Agadez, smugglers are often gatekeepers to migrants, including when they are at their most vulnerable. Many organisations engage but lack of coordination between organisations appears to further limit smugglers' willingness to engage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Political Economy Analyses (PEAs) on local smuggling dynamics in key programming hubs or segments along the CMR to understand the incentives, interests and needs of actors in the smuggling network. • Establish a clear organisational policy on when and how to engage with smugglers based on existing evidence. Use this policy as a basis for coordinating with other organisations and working towards a shared approach for engaging with smugglers.
<p>In Ouagadougou, working with migrant associations and volunteers appears to be a promising practice for reaching vulnerable migrants but there is a need for more sustained engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen contact and exchange with migrant associations both at informal and institutional levels and do regular "check-ins" to ensure the relationship is maintained. • Communicate on what services they can and cannot offer to migrants and provide clear and transparent information on the criteria for receiving assistance. Referrals by migrant associations will be inefficient and can undermine migrants' trust if expectations for support are not met.

¹³⁴ KI Panama Red Cross, October 2019.

5.2 Recommendations to donors

Table 4: Recommendations to donors

Key Gap	Recommendations
<p>Evidence suggests targeting and access strategies (specifically coordination issues) have continued to pose key challenges to migration programming. Some stakeholders noted a lack of clarity on targeting at the programme level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify policy on targeting and provide clear direction to implementers on what success looks like for programmes that target transit migrants. This could be facilitated by commissioning a review of data on vulnerabilities among different groups within migration flows and using it to set clearer targets at the programme level. • Convene working groups with experts and programme stakeholders during design phases of programmes focused on developing clear targeting and access strategies. For migration programming, these could include: i) defining new programmatic approaches, including those based on a route-based logic; ii) defining a clear policy on targeting (including for local populations and specific sub-groups) for different areas where the programme is working; and iii) detailing strategies for access, including on complex issues, focusing on engaging smugglers and working with local authorities.
<p>Lack of trust due to misperceptions of humanitarian actors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission further research on issues surrounding trust to develop effective strategies. Different topics could include: i) perceptions of migrant-targeted support programmes; ii) the role of host communities in creating trust and accessing vulnerable migrants; iii) impact on trust of linking immediate humanitarian assistance with return programming; and iv) investigating different levels of trust in different community actors (including humanitarian organisations), to identify effective entry points for service delivery to migrants.
<p>Vulnerabilities are likely to be highest among stranded, expelled migrants. Vulnerabilities are also highest later in the route. There is also evidence that stranded and expelled migrants are particularly vulnerable to financial, physical and mental stress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate greater shares of funding towards key programming hubs later in the route. Assistance should be available along the route but evidence suggests this is where needs and tensions are highest. • Fund increased programming tailored to the situation of expelled and stranded migrants. This could be facilitated by targeted needs assessments. • Create an area-based strategy for key programming hubs where needs are high and complex that explicitly detail priorities. Strategies could draw on an analysis of needs of different population groups (migrants with different types of vulnerability, local residents, local authorities) and work done by different actors. Strategies could draw from: i) a review of evidence; ii) commissioning additional research, including PEAs and stakeholder mapping exercises; and iii) consultations with key actors within each hub. Strategies could include explicit coordination mechanisms. Developing on the
<p>Security personnel are key sources of abuse for migrants along the CMR.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy to address the role of local government entities in causing harm to migrants. This could include making funding for programming to government actors conditional on spot checks.

Annex 1 - Desk Review

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Annex 2 - Key Informants

Table 5: Overview of KIIs¹³⁵

	 Local Stakeholders	 Service Providers	
Ouagadougou	<p>#KII: 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sonef • Nour • Impérial Transport • Rombo Voyage (bus companies) • City Hall 5th arrondissement • Maison des Sénégalais • Sonitrav bus station • Municipal Police • Passport Services • Action Sociale (Patte d'Oie) 	<p>#KII: 17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IOM • CERMID • Alerte Migration Afrique • CONAREF (National Commission for Refugees) • Burkinabé Red Cross • Spanish Red Cross • Ministry of Women and National Solidarity 	32
Agadez	<p>#KII: 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Protection Regional Department (DRPE) • Agadez Governorate • Regional Council • Registry Office • Sultanate • Neighbourhood chief • Ghetto owners • Migration Facilitators Ministry of Interior • National Commission for Human Rights 	<p>#KII: 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IOM • COOPI • Médecins du Monde Belgium • International Rescue Committee (IRC) • French Red Cross, Nigerien Red Cross • Regional Directorate for the Empowerment of Women and the Protection of Children (UNICEF-funded) • Regional Health Centre of Agadez, • Association pour le Bien-Etre, Association Nigérienne pour le Marketing Social (ANIMAS SUTURA) 	30
Niamey	<p>#KII: 0</p> <p>-</p>	<p>#KII: 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Danish Red Cross • IRC • IOM • UNICEF • MMC West Africa 	5
Total:	30	37	67

¹³⁵ In some instances, the team interviewed multiple informants from a single organisation.

Annex 3 - Qualitative Sample

IMREF conducted interviews in November and December 2019.

Table 6: Detailed list of in-depth interviews with migrants

#	Location	Type	Age range	Participants	SSS II beneficiary ¹³⁶	Gender	Vulnerability profile	Destination	#
1.	Ouagadougou	FGD	21-35	Male migrants staying at Maison des Senegalais	No	Male	1 participant chronic disease	Libya	5
2.	Ouagadougou	FGD	17-26	Women from Nigeria, victims of trafficking	Yes	Female	5 participants TIP survivors	Nigeria	5
3.	Ouagadougou	FGD	26-47	Senegalese men	No	Male	3 returnees from Algeria	Algeria	5
4.	Ouagadougou	FGD	17-26	Men from Burkina Faso	No	Male	3 minors	Mali, potentially Libya	5
5.	Ouagadougou	FGD	25-44	Men from Senegal, Benin and Ivory Coast	No	Male	No	Libya, Algeria	5
6.	Ouagadougou	FGD	28-36	Women from Togo	No	Female	Women, stranded	Unsure	5
7.	Ouagadougou	FGD	28-34	Men from Gabon, Chad and Congo	No	Male	No	Europe	5
8.	Ouagadougou	FGD	21-33	Men from Burkina Faso	No	Male	All expelled from Libya or Algeria	Europe	5
9.	Ouagadougou	FGD	28-36	Men awaiting return	Yes	Male	All expelled from Libya or Algeria	Return	5
10.	Ouagadougou	FGD	26-35	Men awaiting return	Yes	Male	1 expelled from Algeria	Return	5

¹³⁶ This excludes migrants who have received SAR (Search and Rescue) Assistance from IOM and do not currently receive services from the IOM.

#	Location	Type	Age range	Participants	SSS II beneficiary ¹³⁶	Gender	Vulnerability profile	Destination	#
11.	Ouagadougou	Case study	37	Woman from Burkina Faso engaging in circular migration to Senegal	No	Female	No	Senegal	1
12.	Ouagadougou	Case study	28	Man from Togo	No	Male	Spontaneous return from Algeria	Libya	1
13.	Ouagadougou	Case study	36	Woman from Senegal travelling alone	Yes	Female	Sex-based vulnerabilities	Unsure	1
14.	Ouagadougou	Case study	37	Man from Guinea	No	Male	Homeless	Nigeria	1
15.	Ouagadougou	Case study	21	Man from Guinea	Yes	Male	No identification paper, denied entry at the border between Burkina Faso and Niger	Algeria	1
16.	Ouagadougou	Case study	17	Minor from Guinea travelling alone	No	Male	Minor	Libya	1
17.	Ouagadougou	Case study	33	Returnee man	Yes	Male	Deportation from Algeria	Unsure	1
18.	Ouagadougou	Case study	28	Woman from Burkina Faso	Yes	Female	Sex-based vulnerabilities	Senegal	1
19.	Ouagadougou	Case study	33	Man from Benin	Yes	Male	Formerly detained	Benin	1
20.	Ouagadougou	Case study	32	Man from Senegal	No	Male	No	Libya or Algeria	1
21.	Ouagadougou	Case study	30	Man from Guinea	No	Male	Returned from Algeria with no support	Unsure	1
22.	Ouagadougou	Case study	26	Man from Senegal	No	Male	Returned from Algeria with no support	Unsure	1

#	Location	Type	Age range	Participants	SSS II beneficiary ¹³⁶	Gender	Vulnerability profile	Destination	#
23.	Ouagadougou	Case study	34	Man from Senegal	No	Male	No	Europe	1
24.	Ouagadougou	Case study	34	Woman from Guinea	No	Female	Stranded in Ouaga, head of household	Europe	1
25.	Ouagadougou	Case study	26	Man from Liberia	Yes	Male	Deported from Algeria	Liberia	1
26.	Agadez	FGD	27-35	Malian men stranded	No	Male	3 deported from Algeria	Algeria and Europe	5
27.	Agadez	FGD	25-39	Women in brothel from Congo, Cameroon, Mali, CAR	No	Female	5 women engaging in sex work, including 2 SGBV survivors	Europe, via Algeria	5
28.	Agadez	FGD	18-25	Women from Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali	No	Female	1 woman with a chronic disease, 1 woman head of household, 1 SGBV survivor	Europe, via Libya	5
29.	Agadez	FGD	30-50	Nigerien men planning to migrate after expulsion from Algeria	No	Male	5 deported from Algeria	Libya, Algeria, Europe	5
30.	Agadez	FGD	25-40	Men from Cameroon, Benin, Ivory Coast and the Gambia in a ghetto	No	Male	5 deported from Algeria, 1 with self-reported psychosocial issues, 1 survivor of SGBV	Europe	5
31.	Agadez	FGD	19-24	Gambian men arrived recently in Agadez, staying in a ghetto	No	Male	No	Europe	5
32.	Agadez	FGD	19-31	Men from Guinea, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, staying in community	No	Male	3 deported from Algeria	Europe	5
33.	Agadez	FGD	18-37	Gambian men stranded	Yes	Male	5 in a situation of strandedness	Europe	5
34.	Agadez	FGD	16-17	Male minors from Ivory Coast, Guinea, Burkina Faso	Yes	Male	5 minors	Europe	5

#	Location	Type	Age range	Participants	SSS II beneficiary ¹³⁶	Gender	Vulnerability profile	Destination	#
35.	Agadez	FGD	18-32	Mixed group (3 men, 2 women) from Mali	No	Male / Female	1 SGBV survivor	Algeria, Europe	5
36.	Agadez	FGD	26-35	Transit women	No	Female	4 expelled from Algeria, 2 SGBV survivors, 3 women with children	Algeria, Libya, Europe	5
37.	Agadez	FGD	18-40	Cameroonian men AVRR to Cameroon	Yes	Male	No	Cameroon	5
38.	Agadez	FGD	22-36	Senegalese men stranded in Agadez	No	Male	4 stranded in Agadez	Europe	5
39.	Agadez	FGD	21-33	Guinean and Senegalese men, mostly restaurant workers	No	Male	1 migrant who was in jail, 3 expelled from Libya, 1 from Algeria	Europe	5
40.	Agadez	Case study	30	Disabled man from Burkina Faso	Yes	Male	Physical disability	Considering return	1

Annex 3 - Limitations

There are methodological and practical limitations on the findings of this study.

First, research findings in these two locations are not externally valid. The study provides insight into the vulnerabilities of the qualitative sample, how they evolved, and how to address them. However, the methodology of the study is purely qualitative and did not engage a representative sample. In addition, IMREF collected data over November and December 2019. Consultations with organisations suggest that vulnerability profiles evolve rapidly along the CMR in reaction to changes in security contexts and migration management policies. Moreover, findings only apply to migrants who transit through the hubs of Ouagadougou and Agadez. As a result, lessons from Ouagadougou and Agadez cannot be generalised to all of the CMR.

Second, IMREF faced challenges in accessing some of the most vulnerable migrants. These challenges are similar to those often faced by humanitarian organisations in transit hubs:

- The research conducted for this study suggests that some vulnerable migrants do not transit through the study locations on their journeys to Europe and North Africa.¹³⁷ IMREF was able to speak to a number of returned migrants who had not gone through the study locations at the time of their north-bound journeys. Although anecdotal, these migrants appeared to be at greatest risk of harm when they were actively avoiding authorities or when in organised smuggling networks; and were out of reach for potential assistance.¹³⁸
- IMREF did not interview some groups that are generally assumed to have higher levels of vulnerability, such as transit migrants under 15 and over 65 as well as LGBTQI-identifying migrants, despite some informants reporting that they are present in Ouagadougou and Agadez.¹³⁹ For LGBTQI-identifying individuals and children under the age of 15, this is primarily because of difficulties in identification, safeguarding and Do No Harm concerns. Migrants over 65 could not be identified through referrals from organisations nor from approaching migrants directly in migration hubs in Ouagadougou and Agadez. Finally, enumerators were unable to negotiate access to migrants in jail with local authorities. IMREF used data from the desk review and KIIs to partially fill gaps related to their profiles.
- The study did not disaggregate between economic migrants and migrants who were forced to leave their home countries. As a result, vulnerabilities linked to forced migration are not explored in the study.
- The research design did not include direct questions on sensitive issues such as Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in order to minimise the risk of causing harm to the psychosocial wellbeing of the participants. Enumerators asked informants generic questions about sensitive issues. (e.g. "Have you had any experiences during this trip that you think are specific to women? If you want to tell us about it now, you can.") This means that informants may have chosen not to share some of the challenges that they had experienced.

This limits IMREF's ability to provide an exhaustive list of vulnerable profiles that humanitarian and development organisations in the selected areas are targeting but not reaching, and what inhibits migrants with these profiles from accessing assistance. The report signposts when it draws on the direct perspectives of vulnerable individuals, the literature, or other sources such as protection providers, other migrants, community members, local leaders, bus drivers, or other organisations in the community. Data from Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and MMC is used to triangulate findings. However, both data sources do not systematically provide data disaggregated by vulnerable groups that can be used to understand which migrants are not reached by organisations in each location.

Finally, literature on good practices in targeting and accessing vulnerable migrants in transit settings is scarce. The report draws from literature on identifying Victims of Trafficking (VoT) and on targeting in displacement settings, but good practices are not all transferrable to the CMR due to challenges specific to transit migration, especially the high mobility of transit migrants. As a result, the study relies on key informants and FGD participants to assess good practice and gaps related to targeting and access.

¹³⁷ KI DRPE Agadez, KI IOM Agadez.

¹³⁸ CS21, CS22, FGD39.

¹³⁹ KI IOM Agadez, KI French Red Cross Agadez.

Annex 4 - Variations in the qualitative sample among sub-groups

While pre-existing personal characteristics affect vulnerability, there is also variation within these sub-groups. Literature generally points to two main factors that create variation in vulnerability: higher levels of resources and reasons for migrating.¹⁴⁰

Higher levels of resources play a key role in avoiding harm on the CMR. Past research finds that women, children, persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses and forced migrants have lower levels of resources.¹⁴¹ They are less able to gain information on the risks and opportunities along the journey, and to fund their onward journeys.¹⁴² However, even within these groups, FGD respondents describe varying levels of resources and access to information, influencing their ability to cope with events in transit. For instance, some migrants mention that those in their travel groups who had funds to give bribes to security personnel were able to escape mistreatment.¹⁴³

Past research also points out that forced migrants are taking greater risks, suggesting, for example, that forced migrants rely more heavily on smugglers during their journeys.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, migrants' unwillingness or inability to return to their place of origin means that they are likely to become stranded for greater periods of time if they cannot or are not willing to seek asylum in countries through which they transited.¹⁴⁵ Vulnerabilities linked to forced migration are not explored in the study due to the lack of available evidence in the qualitative sample.

¹⁴⁰ OHCHR (2017), *Principles and Guidelines migrants in vulnerable situations*; IOM (2017), *Migrant Vulnerability to Human Trafficking and Exploitation: Evidence from the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Migration Routes*.

¹⁴¹ The section excludes LGBTQI-identifying migrants and older migrants as enumerators have not interviewed them and information on them is limited among key informants.

¹⁴² The interaction between resources and vulnerabilities is not explored in the scope of this study. For a more detailed review, see: IOM (2017).

¹⁴³ Participants in FGD26

¹⁴⁴ See OHCHR (2017), IOM (2017).

¹⁴⁵ IOM (2017).