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Responses to conflict, irregular migration, human trafficking and illicit flows along transnational pathways in West Africa

Evidence synthesis
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About this report

This report was prepared for the Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme. The programme brings together leading experts to examine conflict-affected borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and the factors that shape violent and peaceful behaviour. Funded by UK Aid, XCEPT includes actionable research on international conflict response to inform policies and programmes that support peace.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission
AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
AU	African Union
AU.COMMIT	African Union Commission Initiative Against Trafficking
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EUCAP	EU Capacity and Assistance Programme
EUTF	EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FAMA	Malian Armed Forces
GAR-SI	Groupes d'Action Rapides – Surveillance et Intervention au Sahel
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (aka Islamic State)
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
PARSEC	Programme d'Appui au Renforcement de la Sécurité
TCC	Troop-Contributing Country
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UNOHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Summary

This paper explores the links between conflict, irregular migration, human trafficking and other illicit flows along transnational pathways in West Africa – focusing on Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and Libya. It also looks at responses to these – to conflict and to human smuggling and trafficking – in this context, and the various issues and challenges faced.

The West Africa region is the site of numerous intrastate conflicts, which have transnational dimensions. The two main conflicts in Nigeria involve Boko Haram in the north-east, and local ethnic groups in the oil-rich Niger Delta in the south. Conflict in Mali has three interlinked strands: recurrent Tuareg rebellions in the north of the country; ongoing political violence since a military coup in 2012; and attempts by jihadist groups to turn the country into an Islamic state. Burkina Faso has also seen political violence and faces an Islamist challenge from armed jihadist groups. Niger has little conflict itself but is significantly impacted by the various conflicts underway around it.

Migration and migrant smuggling are widespread in West Africa, driven largely by conflict and lack of economic opportunities. The vast majority of migration flows are intraregional. For West African migrants attempting to leave the region, the main route is to head north through Mali and/or Niger, and either go through Algeria or directly to Libya, from where some attempt to reach Europe. Movement to Mali and Niger is generally licit, but from there on is irregular and risky (many die), and can involve migrant smugglers. Migrant smuggling is important for local economies en route, notably Gao in Mali and Agadez in Niger.

Similar factors fuel human trafficking in the region. It is carried out by both non-state armed groups and organised criminal groups, largely for forced labour and sexual exploitation. The high levels of migration create opportunities for traffickers.

Other illicit flows and markets in the West Africa region are significant. They can be categorised into: externally sourced illicit goods moved through/distributed locally (e.g. drugs from Latin America, illegal weapons); illegal commodities sourced locally but sold in global markets (e.g. illicit minerals and wildlife products); and activities driven by local demand (e.g. counterfeit goods).

Migrant smuggling, human trafficking and other illicit flows involve both non-state armed groups and organised criminal groups. Non-state armed groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, jihadist groups in Mali and diverse militias in Libya all benefit from human trafficking (and migrant smuggling can be transformed to human trafficking). Many such groups are involved in drugs trafficking, trade in illicit weapons and other illicit flows – in the case of drugs and weapons, both for their own use and as a source of revenue to fund their operations. Ongoing conflicts in many parts of the region also create conditions conducive for organized criminal gangs.

A number of multilateral forces have been created to address the various conflicts in these West African countries. The African-led International Support Mission (AFISMA) tackled the terrorist threat in northern Mali, essentially supporting the French military action, Operation Serval in 2012-2014. This largely succeeded in curbing jihadist expansion and retaking territory but, in view of the continuing threat, was transformed into a permanent French military presence, Operation Barkhane. However, France has been accused of using the force to further its own interests (e.g. curbing migration). AFISMA was absorbed into the UN-authorised Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Mali remains engulfed by violence, though without MINUSMA the security situation would be even worse. The Multinational Joint Task Force

(MNJTF), set up to combat Boko Haram, essentially involves contributing countries operating within their own national borders, but in a coordinated manner. Gains by MNJTF have been short-lived, undermined by structural and other constraints.

African frameworks to combat irregular migration and human trafficking, notably by the African Union, reflect a long-term approach seeking to address the drivers of migration and human trafficking. However, implementation of these policies is hampered by lack of capacity and resources, and dependence on member states – who have varying capacities/resources, and can lack political commitment.

The European Union (EU) approach to irregular migration from West Africa has been more short-term, largely focused on securitisation to stop the flow of people, rather than on support for development (job creation, infrastructure, services, governance, etc.) to address migration drivers. Securitisation entails, in particular, enhancing border controls, strengthening the capacity of security forces, and tightening visa policies. African governments have also been pressured by the EU to enforce this approach. It has been massively detrimental to local communities dependent on the migration industry. The resultant loss of livelihoods – and the failure to provide alternative income sources – is fuelling criminality and instability, and actually exacerbating migration drivers. The EU's reliance on local (not always democratic) leaders to enforce the clampdown on human smuggling is further undermining citizen-state relations in already fragile states. In the long run, these pressures are likely to fuel instability in the region and drive increased migration.

Overall, neither responses to conflict in the region, nor responses to irregular migration, address underlying causes (e.g. lack of economic opportunities). The stress in conflict responses in on taking a security approach: military interventions, driving insurgent groups out of territory they have taken, and securing those gains. There appear to be negligible efforts to address *causes* of conflict, such as weak governance, state corruption, marginalisation of certain groups, lack of economic opportunities, etc. Other issues highlighted are the difficulties involved in getting multiple countries to coalesce around a single objective, rather than prioritising or factoring in their respective individual interests, as well as overcoming resource and capacity constraints. Responses to migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the region would seem to be even more problematic. Vast resources are being invested into these programmes, notably by the European Union, but again the approach is a securitised one. While commitments to promote development are included in policies, little is being done to follow through on these in practice. **These shortcomings in both conflict and human smuggling/trafficking responses undermine their effectiveness, especially in the long-term.**

1. Introduction

Nexus between conflict, irregular migration, human trafficking and other illicit flows

This paper focuses on West Africa and explores the nexus between conflict, irregular migration, human trafficking and other illicit flows along transnational pathways. Definitions of these terms are given below, but the paper does not look at each of these in a generic manner: only within the context of West Africa.

Linkages between these diverse phenomena are strong and mutually reinforcing. Transnational conflict and irregular migration are strongly inter-linked. Conflict fuels both migrant smuggling and human trafficking, which often (always in the case of human smuggling) take place along transnational pathways. There are a number of features of conflict situations that increase vulnerability and facilitate/fuel trafficking in persons (TIP) (UNODC, 2018b: 5):

- State collapse or the breakdown of state institutions, erosion of the rule of law, and resulting greater impunity foster an environment in which traffickers can operate easily;
- Social fragmentation and family breakdown, as people are separated and lose their support networks. Children who are separated from their families are particularly vulnerable to being targeted by traffickers;
- Increased socioeconomic stress in situations of armed conflict, for example through loss of livelihoods and greater humanitarian need;
- Displacement, both internal and as refugees: displaced people have limited opportunities to generate income or access education, and typically have limited financial resources.

All the above factors make people in armed conflict situations more vulnerable to exploitation. 'In these situations, without the tools to adequately maintain their livelihoods, people are more likely to look for opportunities that entail risky situations or illicit economies, which are often home to traffickers' (US, 2016). Migration (particularly the influx of large numbers of refugees) can in turn fuel conflict.

Conflict also fuels other illicit flows (e.g. of drugs, weapons, oil, minerals), as there is a clear nexus between conflict and crime – itself intertwined with the movement of people. Organised crime groups can be drawn to conflict areas by the opportunities these offer (e.g. through weakened state institutions and rule of law). Armed groups involved in conflicts can become involved in criminal activities, including human smuggling and trafficking, as a way to generate funds, even to the extent that making money becomes their primary objective, displacing ideological goals.

Conflict can have massively detrimental effects on local economies, in countries both directly and indirectly affected by conflict. This means that practices such as migrant smuggling and other illicit flows can fill key gaps, providing local people with sources of livelihood and vital income.

The close links between these different phenomena – transnational conflict, human smuggling and trafficking, illicit flows, conflict economies – make responses to these especially challenging. Given the common causal factors, a holistic approach to combatting these appears vital – but is not always feasible in practice. Efforts to combat one problem in isolation could have adverse effects on others. For example, curbing migrant smuggling can increase economic hardship in local communities who are dependent on smuggling, and thus push people deeper into illicit activities, fuelling increased human smuggling and trafficking. Furthermore, given the range of phenomena involved, any response requires the coordination of diverse stakeholders

operating at different levels – international, regional, national, local – and often possessing different, even conflicting, priorities.

This paper looks at transnational pathways through Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria, Mali and Niger to Libya. The region is characterised by transnational conflict and is a major route for human trafficking and migrant smuggling, as well as for illicit flows of drugs, weapons, minerals and other goods. The paper explores the links between non-state armed groups, organised criminal groups, smugglers and traffickers, and the overall nexus between conflict and crime, and between conflict, irregular migration, human trafficking and other illicit flows. The paper also examines responses to transnational conflict in the region and to human smuggling and trafficking, and the challenges and issues involved in these.

Definitions and methodology

Armed conflict	Involves the use of armed force between opposing parties. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) identifies two types: a) International armed conflict – between two or more State Parties b) Non-international armed conflict – between government and non-state armed group(s) or between two or more such groups.
Transnational conflict	An armed conflict that extends or operates across national boundaries (Twagiramungu et al, 2019: 379).
Conflict economy	Defined by Chatham House (2019) as: a system of producing, mobilizing and allocating resources to sustain competitive and embedded violence, both directly and indirectly.
Migrant	The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as: any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/ her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status, (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.
International migration	International migration refers to short-term, temporary or permanent outmigration.
Refugee	According to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who has fled his/her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution and should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. Refugees are defined and protected by international law.
Migrant/human smuggling	Unlike trafficking, which can take place within the same country, migrant smuggling always entails transborder movement. Human or migrant smuggling is defined in Article 3 of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants (UN OHCHR, 2000) as: 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.

Trafficking in Persons (TIP)[1]	The definition of TIP includes three components: the act, the means and the purpose. It is defined in Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN OHCHR, 2000) as:
	The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

This review is based on literature obtained from various databases (e.g. Google, Google Scholar, Scopus) using a range of search terms ('conflict response', 'trafficking in persons', 'irregular migration', 'illicit flows', 'Mali', 'Niger', 'Nigeria', 'Boko Haram', 'Al-Shabaab', etc.). The paper draws on a mixture of academic and grey literature, as well as some media reports – in particular for recent developments in the West Africa region. Grey literature includes reports and studies by practitioners (e.g. the UN Office on Drugs and Crime) and think tanks. The literature review was conducted over a limited timeframe (largely completed by mid-2020) and as such should not be considered comprehensive. There were also limitations in the evidence base, in particular evaluations of interventions to combat TIP, migrant smuggling, and so on.

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[1] Human trafficking and trafficking in persons (TIP) are used interchangeably in the literature.

2. Transnational conflict in West Africa

Transnational conflict

Transnational conflicts are armed conflicts that extend or operate across national boundaries. The literature also refers to the 'internationalisation' of local/intrastate conflict, whereby foreign parties (state or non-state) become involved, or the conflict/its effects (e.g. refugees) spread across national borders to neighbouring regions. Types of transnational conflict include (de Waal et al, 2019: 3):

- Interstate wars
- External support to belligerents in interstate wars
- Low-intensity confrontations between states (militarised disputes)
- Transnational insurgencies
- External support to coup-makers or governments resisting attempted coups.

The evidence points to a decline in interstate conflicts, and the growing internationalisation of local conflicts. Relevant factors include international economic ties, links between armed groups and transnational support networks (e.g. based on ethnicity), supportive foreign governments, and illicit revenue sources. Syria is an example of an internationalised intrastate conflict.

Around the world, transnational conflict is becoming more common. Local conflicts increasingly draw in a complex mesh of state actors, armed groups and criminal networks. These transnational conflicts both fuel and feed off the displacement of people and the illicit trade in goods such as gold and minerals. External involvement makes conflicts bloodier and more drawn out than non-internationalised civil wars, and worsens the impacts on people, economies and prospects for lasting peace.

Transnational conflicts thus pose significant challenges. The contagion effect means that conflict spreads, taking a bigger human and economic toll (violence disrupts regional trade, for example). There are also implications for conflict resolution efforts: with many more parties and more diverse interests involved – as well as typical fragmentation and factionalism – it can be difficult to identify parties to engage with, and to reach agreement on collective action.

Transnational conflict in Africa

The Transnational Conflict in Africa (TCA) dataset[2] was built by combining, augmenting and revising several existing datasets which capture some elements of transnational conflict, and including new data falling outside the scope of existing databases (Twagiramungu et al, 2019: 380). It found that most conflicts in Africa have a significant transnational element – reversing the standard perception that the vast majority of African conflicts are internal and not interstate (de Waal et al, 2019: 1).

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[2] World Peace Foundation (2019). The Transnational Conflict in Africa dataset. https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/the-transnational-conflict-in-africa-dataset/

We find that transnationality is a major feature of armed conflicts in Africa… Thus, most of the so-called 'civil wars' in Africa are more correctly described as internationalised internal conflicts (Twagiramungu et al, 2019: 379).

This reinterpretation of the pattern of African conflicts has implications for conflict prevention, management and resolution policies (Twagiramungu et al, 2019: 389):

1. Conflict resolution can't be seen as solely an internal matter for the country concerned, but also as an exercise in mediating the political interests of neighbours and regional hegemons. It follows that, when the neighbours' interests are in alignment, or have been resolved through regional mediation, resolution of the internal conflict is far more likely than when those neighbouring countries have conflicting interests. An example of the former is the common positions of IGAD[3] member states facilitating Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement; by contrast, the differing positions of the neighbouring countries hindered the peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

2. The neighbours involved in peace missions (political and military) already have a stake in the country concerned. This could strengthen their ability to influence the outcome of the process but could also mean that there is a greater risk that their involvement is not impartial, and that peace negotiations/peace enforcement operations are an extension of national security interests or hegemonic ambitions.

A separate paper on *The challenge of stability and security in West Africa* by Marc *et al* (2015: 18) notes that '(t)he frequency of regional spillovers of internal conflicts in West Africa highlights the close level of interconnectivity between countries'. They further elaborate (Marc *et al*, 2015: 18):

Diverse transnational links facilitate the spread and spillover of conflicts. Borders are porous, and communities on either side maintain close ties based on ethnicity, language, culture, and trade. Shared grievances, such as environmental or socioeconomic factors, or marginalization based on a common identity, find ideological support across borders.

They argue that this necessitates a region-wide approach to conflict resolution and management (Marc *et al*, 2015: 18).

West Africa

The West Africa region is the site of numerous intrastate conflicts, which have transnational dimensions – through involvement of external parties, spread of conflict and instability across borders, displacement of people, etc.

Nigeria

The two main conflicts in Nigeria involve Boko Haram in the north-east, and local ethnic groups in the oil-rich Niger Delta in the south.

Boko Haram is an extremist religious group which has been waging war against the Nigerian state since 2009: its initial goal was the institution of Sharia (Islamic law) in Borno State, but from 2009 onwards it has been

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[3] Intergovernmental Authority on Development – an eight-country trade bloc in Africa.

fighting for the Islamisation of the whole country (Annan, 2014; Jesperson, 2017; Nwadinobi, 2019). Boko Haram became progressively more aggressive and violent, seizing control of large areas of territory in the north-east, and later spreading operations to neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon. The conflict reached a peak in terms of numbers killed in 2014, when over 10,000 people were killed. Divisions within the group have led to fragmentation (with some factions allying with ISIS), and the emergence of (autonomous) local chapters.

In the Niger Delta, local ethnic groups have been engaged in intermittent conflict with the government (as well as multinational oil companies) as far back as 1966 (Jesperson, 2017). While the region is the major source of oil revenue for Nigeria, it has been neglected by the government and has very high poverty levels. Moreover, oil extraction has had detrimental effects on agriculture, fishing and the local environment, causing further anger. This is manifested in armed groups carrying out periodic attacks on oil facilities/government targets; but levels of violence are far less than in the north-east.

Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger

Conflict in Mali is multidimensional with three different but interlinked strands: one, recurrent Tuareg rebellions in the north of the country; two, ongoing political violence since a military coup in 2012; and three, attempts by jihadist groups to turn the country into an Islamic state (Boas, 2019).

Burkina Faso has also seen political violence, and faces an Islamist challenge from armed jihadist groups, including some with links to those in neighbouring Mali (Boas, 2019).

Niger has largely been spared conflict but is significantly affected by the various conflicts underway around it, notably as a transit/destination country for migrants (see below).

3. Migrant smuggling, human trafficking and other illicit flows

Migrant smuggling

Migration and migrant smuggling are widespread in West Africa, driven by diverse factors: notably conflict and lack of economic opportunities. It is mostly young men who are involved in irregular migration. However, the vast majority of migration flows in West Africa are intraregional, or seasonal migration for work in North Africa – only a small proportion of migrants go to Europe (UNODC, 2018: 83). Most countries in the region are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which allows free movement of citizens between members. However, lack of formal documentation and other issues such as officials demanding bribes, promote irregular migration even in the ECOWAS region.

The main routes out of the region (to North Africa or Europe) for migrants from West African countries is to head north through Mali and/or Niger (see Figure 2 below). Gao in Mali is a transit hub for migrants, who either cross into Niger – where Agadez is the main hub – or head to Tamanrasset in Algeria; both routes end in Libya (Tripoli), though migrants from Agadez could go straight to Sabha in Libya, or via Tamanrasset in Algeria. Libya (or Morocco) will be the destination country for some, but for some it will be a transit country en route to Europe. UNODC's 2018 report on migrant smuggling stresses that some migrants, especially from Sahel countries such as Mali, Niger and Chad, are seasonal migrants, moving to Libya each year just after the harvest and returning home months later for the rainy season (UNODC, 2018: 86). Most of these stay in rural and agricultural areas close to the border.
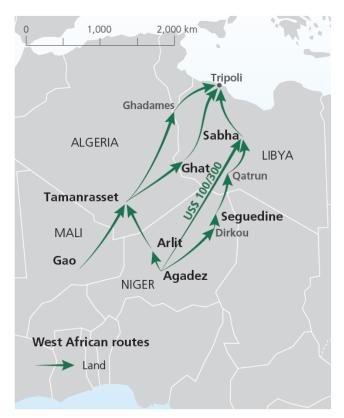
Figure 2: Migration routes from West Africa to Libya

Source: UNODC, 2018: 83.

Movement to Mali and Niger is generally licit (e.g. using commercial bus services), but from there on is irregular, and can involve reliance on migrant smugglers. Neither Algeria nor Libya are members of ECOWAS, though Algeria does allow visa-free entry for citizens of Mali. Moreover, the desert crossing is fraught with risk and very difficult for migrants making their own way. At the same time, even with assistance from smugglers, migrants face huge risks – from harsh desert conditions, from armed groups operating in the region, and of being kidnapped for ransom or trafficked. At a minimum there are nearly 500 deaths per year in the Sahara in Niger and Algeria alone, though the actual figure is likely to be much higher (UNODC, 2018: 83).

Migrant smuggling plays a major role in local economies en route, most notably in Gao and Agadez. As discussed below, the dearth of alternative livelihood opportunities has led many 'licit' actors (e.g. taxi drivers, guides, restauranteurs, hoteliers/landlords) to become involved in the 'migration industry'. 'As soon as migrants get off the bus in Agadez, they are immediately approached by people offering them accommodation in the so-called "ghettos" and onward transport to Libya' (UNODC, 2018: 86). Nomadic tribes in the region (north Niger, Mali, Libya), such as the Tuareg and Tebu (or Toubou), are often responsible for providing transportation across the Sahara, having been operating there for generations and with strong cross-border tribal ties. In contrast to the numerous, small-scale 'informal' groups and networks carrying out migrant smuggling in Niger and Mali, smugglers in Libya tend to be more organised (UNODC, 2018).

Trafficking in people

The diverse conflicts in West African countries, lack of livelihood opportunities, climate change and the fragility of states in the region, are among the key factors that have fuelled irregular migration and human trafficking. This is carried out by both non-state armed groups and organised criminal groups. Common features of TIP in the region are the exploitation of both foreigners and locals by such groups for forced labour in agriculture, artisanal mines, domestic servitude, transport, begging, the informal sector and sexual slavery/prostitution/forced marriage (US DoS, 2019). The high levels of migration in the region create opportunities for exploitation by traffickers.

Nigeria

Nigeria is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking: Nigerians from rural/conflict-affected areas fall victim to trafficking; individuals from other countries in the region such as Benin are trafficked through Nigeria to Libya (and Europe); and trafficking victims are exploited within the country. Boko Haram has become notorious for forced abduction of girls and women – including of 276 girls from a school in Borno State in May 2014, and 110 girls from a school in Yobe State in 2018 – for forced marriage, sexual slavery, domestic servitude and even suicide bombings (Nwadinobi, 2019). Boko Haram and other Islamist groups (e.g. ISIS West Africa) forcibly recruit, abduct and use child soldiers in various roles, including increasingly as suicide bombers in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad (US DoS, 2019). By contrast, human trafficking in the Niger Delta is driven largely by lack of economic opportunities: people are lured by traffickers with the offer of better education or work opportunities and the promise of a better future (Nwadinobi, 2019: 3). Women and children are especially vulnerable. Human trafficking rates in the region are far higher than the national average – indeed, the Niger Delta is considered a recruitment hub for human trafficking (US DoS, 2019).

Mali

Both Tuareg insurgent groups and jihadist groups in Mali have been involved in human trafficking (Boas, 2019). Following the 2012 crisis, there have been cases of families forced to 'sell' their children to traffickers because

of poverty, or sell/give them up to armed groups in return for 'community protection'; in addition, jihadist and rebel groups have consistently abducted, forcibly enlisted and trained children – including from neighbouring Mauritania – to become child soldiers (US DoS, 2019). The child soldiers – mostly boys – are used in combat, to carry weapons, staff checkpoints, guard prisoners and for spying (US DoS, 2019). Girls and women are used for sexual slavery and forced marriage (US DoS, 2019).

Niger

Niger's situation as an origin/transit country for irregular migration means that many West Africans become victims of trafficking there (US DoS, 2019). Forms of trafficking are similar to Nigeria and other countries in the region: forced labour in agriculture/mining, etc., begging, and sexual exploitation. In addition, non-state armed groups such as Boko Haram forcibly recruit Nigerien boys to serve as child soldiers, and girls for sexual slavery/forced marriage (US DoS, 2019). EU policies to curb irregular migration (see below) have increased vulnerability to trafficking in Niger.

Benin and Burkina Faso

Trafficking in Benin is largely internal – from rural to urban areas of the country – but transnational criminal groups also 'recruit' women and girls with false promises of employment abroad, and children are trafficked to neighbouring countries for domestic servitude and forced labour. Benin is the largest source of trafficked people to the DRC (US DoS, 2019). Burkina Faso shows similar traits with regard to trafficking: exploitation of children (especially due to poverty), women and girls lured by job promises, migrants transiting through the country, etc.

Libya

West African migrants are particularly exploited in Libya – both by Libyans and transnational organised criminal groups – in forced labour in construction, agriculture and prostitution in Tripoli, Sabha, Benghazi and Misrata (US DoS, 2019). Often this represents a shift in individuals' situations from being smuggled migrants to trafficked people – for example, people are kept in 'detention centres' until they can repay their 'debts' to human smugglers, and are then exploited, even being sold again to other traffickers (US DoS, 2019).
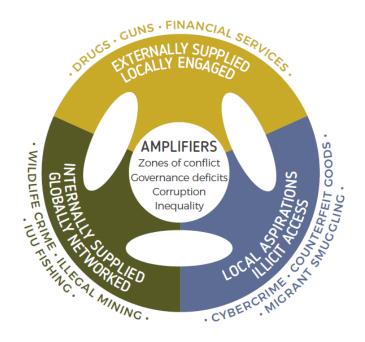
Other illicit flows

Shaw (2017: 6) makes a useful framework for analysing illicit markets and flows in Africa (see Figure 3):

   a) <u>Externally supplied but locally engaged</u> – where illicit goods are externally sourced (from outside Africa) but moved and distributed locally, e.g. narcotics from Latin America.
   b) <u>Internally supplied but globally networked</u> – illegal commodities sourced locally but sold in the global market, e.g. banned environmental products, illicit minerals, locally produced illicit drugs.
   c) <u>Local aspirations through illicit access</u> – activities that are driven by the aspirations for self-advancement by locals, e.g. migrant smuggling, counterfeit goods.

The context in which these activities and transactions occur is crucial in shaping the nature and impact of these criminal markets. Local factors such as conflict, weak governance and widespread corruption all provide conditions that provide both openings and motivations for criminal organisations, weaken state and community responses, and accentuate the impact of organised crime. Shaw (2017: 7) describes these local factors as 'amplifiers'.

Source: Shaw, 2017: 7

West Africa sees all three types of illicit markets and flows. The drug economy in the region is significant and intersects with both conflict and migrant smuggling/trafficking in various ways. Drugs such as cocaine come largely from Latin America: tougher law enforcement in the Caribbean forced suppliers to find other routes to Europe. Small unstable West African coastal states such as Guinea-Bissau became the entry point for illicit drugs that are then moved through the Sahel – conflict and instability there allowing such flows – and on into Europe. Drug trafficking has become tied up with political groups (through corruption). In recent years, entry points to West Africa have shifted to bigger states with large container ports, notably Nigeria; re-containerisation takes place here and smaller quantities are moved overland by highly organised criminal gangs through the Sahel to North Africa and Europe (Shaw, 2017). Conflict in Mali and the presence of French troops has led to the Niger route being used more (Shaw & Mangan, 2014). As well as being a drug transit zone, West Africa is also a market for drugs, with a growing number of drug users – including among non-state armed groups.

Shaw (2017) argues that illicit weapons markets operate in similar ways. In particular, as with drugs, the influx into Africa is driven by suppliers' need to find new routes and/or markets – but in the case of weapons, Africa is the end market rather than a transit zone. Accessing arms greatly strengthens local actors – both non-state armed groups/militias and organised crime groups – and, in turn, contributes to violence and conflict in the region. While most arms in the illicit economy in Africa are sourced externally, there is also local manufacture of weapons (e.g. in South Africa, Sudan and by informal gunsmiths). A further source is weapons 'leaking out' of state supplies: Libya is a notable example of this, with large flows of arms southwards into the Sahel following the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011.

Wildlife products (e.g. ivory, rhino horn, lion bones) are among the environmental goods which originate in Africa but are sold illicitly to external markets. Another example of local goods sold illicitly is oil: 'oil bunkering'

refs to the theft of oil from pipelines. The practice is common in the Niger Delta: from rudimentary beginnings in the late 1980s it has evolved into a sophisticated criminal operation using advanced technologies. An estimated 300,000-400,000 barrels of oil are stolen each day in Nigeria – about 15% of total production (Shaw, 2017: 16). Oil theft in the Niger Delta is linked to the insurgency in the region, and local grievances over the distribution of oil revenue. 'For many young men, bunkering became a "counter culture" as local groups negotiated with offshore cartels for supply in exchange for cash, guns, boats and cars in a virtual parallel economy driven by exclusion' (Shaw, 2017: 16). Note that about a quarter of the stolen oil is sold locally, for refinement into petrol, kerosene and diesel.

As seen, migrant smuggling, human trafficking and other illicit flows in West Africa intersect in multiple and complex ways with transnational conflicts in the region. Non-state armed groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, jihadist groups in Mali and diverse militias in Libya all benefit from human trafficking (and migrant smuggling can be transformed to human trafficking). Many such groups are involved in drugs trafficking, trade in illicit weapons and other illicit flows – in the case of drugs and weapons, both for their own use and as a source of revenue to fund their operations. Ongoing conflicts in many parts of the region also create conditions conducive for organized criminal gangs. The multiple and strong interconnections between migrant smuggling, human trafficking, other illicit flows, and transnational conflict in West Africa point to the need for integrated responses.

4. Transnational conflict responses

Organisations involved in transnational conflict response in West Africa include:

The African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) was set up in 2002, following the 1999 Sirte Declaration, which called for the establishment of a union 'to work towards increased cooperation and integration of African states' and to 'drive Africa's growth and economic development'. The AU's Constitutive Act places strong emphasis on addressing conflict, a reflection of the 1994 Rwandan genocide as one of the driving factors behind the AU's creation. The Constitutive Act 'empowers the AU to intervene in situations of grave concern, when crimes have been committed – war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide'.[4]

All 54 African states, along with the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (a partially recognised state, also known as Western Sahara), are members of the African Union. There are five regions of the AU: north, south, east, west and central, plus the African diaspora.[5] Countries in the western region are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. [Chad falls in the Central region.]

Key factors hampering the AU are lack of political commitment on the part of member states, and resource and capacity constraints. Described as a 'paper tiger', implementation of AU decisions is largely left to individual countries, resulting in patchy adoption of these (Daniel Mulugeta, cited in UK Parliament, 2020). One of the main challenges is member states' reluctance to pool sovereignty. Leaders 'always profess the need to work together with fellow African countries' on the international stage, but 'when it comes to domestic issues they retreat to their cocoons and prefer to be left to do what they will in their own countries' (Professor Tim Murithi, cited in UK Parliament, 2020). According to one commentator, this lack of commitment to the AU also stems from the 'centralised and monopolistic nature of African states' (Mulugeta, cited in UK Parliament, 2020).

With regard to resources and capacity, an indication of the scale of the problem can be gauged from a comparison with the EU. The AU's secretariat has a core staff of 1,500, and the AU's 2016 budget was £315 million – equivalent to around 5% of the European Commission's staff, for a population that is more than double that of the EU's, and compared to the EU's budget of £128 billion (UK Parliament, 2020). The big funding challenge is that many members do not pay their contributions, leaving the AU dependent on donor funding or creating a significant gap between planned budget and actual funding.

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[4] African Union. (2019). 'The African Standby Force' https://www.peaceau.org/en/page/82-african-standby-force-asf-amani-africa-1 (accessed 9 May 2021).

[5] The African Union defines the diaspora as 'consisting of people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union'. The AU Diaspora Division 'serves as the focal point and hub for implementing the African Union decision to invite and encourage the African Diaspora to participate in the building and development of the African continent'. https://au.int/en/diaspora-division (accessed 9 May 2021).

In terms of performance, the AU's record is mixed. While there are examples of it being effective – e.g. the AU Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) – and it has helped bring about a culture change whereby unconstitutional changes of government are now frowned upon, there are many other examples where it was divided and/or was unable to act (UK Parliament, 2020).

This was evident in the response to violence in Mali in 2012. The AU was supposed to have African Standby Forces in each region as part of its peace and security architecture. Operationalisation of these forces was planned for 2008, but deferred to 2010, and then to 2013 and then 2015 (Cocodia, 2020). A panel assessing the readiness of the African Standby Forces in 2014 was told that the North and Central forces were not prepared because of a lack of cooperation and instability within member states, but that the forces of the other three regions – West, East and South – had reached operational status (Cocodia, 2020). The Mali conflict showed this to be untrue as the ECOWAS Standby Force could not be deployed because of lack of readiness (Cocodia, 2020). This failure led to the creation of ad hoc forces to address the Mali crisis (see below) and paved the way for the dominant role played by the French military, which remains in the region to this day and is heavily involved in preventing illicit flows of people through the region to Europe (more detail below), as well as in protecting French economic interests in mining and oil.

In February 2020, the African Union, under the new chair of South Africa, announced that it would deploy a force of 3,000 troops on a temporary basis (six months) to the Sahel region to support counter-terrorism efforts by the multilateral missions operating there (detailed below).[6] However, at that stage, no countries had come forward to volunteer troops, and it was unclear how the deployment would be financed, or how it would interact with the missions already in the region.

[African Union efforts and initiatives to combat irregular migration and TIP are described in the next section 'African initiatives to combat migrant smuggling and TIP'.]

AFISMA

The African-led International Support Mission (AFISMA) was created in late 2012-early 2013 to fight the terrorist threat in northern Mali.

AFISMA came about through an initiative by ECOWAS. Concerned about the growing crisis in Mali, the country's neighbours in ECOWAS carried out intense engagement with the AU and UN on how to respond and with what resources. As seen, the AU's West African Standby Force, intended as a multidisciplinary rapid reaction peacekeeping force to be deployed in times of crisis, was deemed not ready; this paved the way for a coalition of the willing to intervene (World Peace Foundation, 2016). The desire by Chad (a non-ECOWAS country) to be involved, led to the planned force being reformulated as an AU force. AFISMA was authorised by the UN Security Council 2085 in December 2012, and started operations in early 2013 – the first AFISMA troops (from Nigeria) moved into Mali in February 2013. AFISMA essentially supported the French military action (see below), taking control of territory and towns as the French cleared them of militants. AFISMA had a total of 3,300 personnel, including troops from Nigeria (1,186), Chad (2,015), Burkina Faso (495), Niger (657), Senegal (501), Benin (300), Ghana (125), Guinea (144), and Togo (723) (World Peace Foundation, 2016: 4).

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[6] 'African Union plans to send 3,000 troops to the Sahel', *The Defense Post*, 27 February 2020.
https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/02/27/african-union-troops-sahel/

French interventions: Operation Serval, Operation Barkhame, Task Force Takuba

France has a long association with the Sahel and North Africa, through its colonial past. In January 2013, in response to the takeover of northern Mali by jihadist groups (including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and to prevent them taking over the capital, Bamako, French President Francois Hollande announced Operation Serval. Even though moves to set up AFISMA were already underway, the time being taken to make it operational and the rapid progress by jihadists prompted the French move.

Operation Serval had the following objectives: protecting Bamako from falling to the jihadists; targeting rear bases of militant groups in the north of Mali to destroy their offensive capacity; retaking towns occupied by the militants (to be secured subsequently by ECOWAS forces); and fighting terrorism in the Sahel region. The French were able to deploy very quickly, drawing on various French contingents already in the region (Senegal, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso) (Shurkin, 2014: 7). The first three objectives were largely achieved: Bamako was saved; the onslaught from French as well as AFISMA forces drove militants back to the north of Mali, and AFISMA forces secured the liberated towns such as Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao. However, AFISMA contingents 'were uneven in their capacities especially their readiness to engage in robust operations' (World Peace Foundation, 2016: 4). Malian troops deployed in the north also lacked the resources to secure the north.

This was among the factors leading to early recognition that the jihadists could return. The French therefore termed Operation Serval 'mission accomplished' and transformed it into Operation Barkhane – essentially a permanent French military presence in the region (Charbonneau, 2019). In April 2013, the UN authorised its peacekeeping mission in Mali, MINUSMA (see below) to absorb AFISMA – a move that caused considerable tension between the UN and the AU, which felt it had the capacity to respond to the crisis (World Peace Foundation, 2016).

Operation Barkhane is a permanent military intervention covering the G5 Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. There are currently 4,500 French troops in Barkhane, with a further 600 promised by President Macron earlier this year.[7] In terms of authorisation/mandate, Barkhane forces move freely across the countries (except Mauritania, and some restrictions in Burkina Faso); operate autonomously in Mali, as well as in Niger if under 'emergency conditions'; but need the approval of the other countries' respective governments to carry out offensive missions (Charbonneau, 2019). UN Security Council resolutions authorise French troops to use 'all means necessary' to support the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali – MINUSMA (see below). Operation Barkhane is focused on counterterrorism and thus works in parallel with MINUSMA which is focused on stabilisation.

Charbonneau (2019) argues that the French presence (and involvement of other European countries) is not about supporting a peace process, but about managing an insurgency. Moreover, he claims it is a permanent intervention to prevent the flows of migration and illicit trafficking to Europe – flows that are assumed to be caused, in part, by instability in Mali. France also has other interests to protect in the region: the state-owned energy company, Orano, gets a large proportion of its uranium from Niger; Total has oil fields in Mali; and the French have a military base in Chad.

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[7] *Al-Jazeera*. 7 February 2020. 'French soldiers kill more than 30 fighters in Mali operations'. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/french-soldiers-kill-30-fighters-mali-operations-200207185228538.html

There has been vocal public opposition in Sahel countries to the French military presence there. In February 2019, Barkhane forces attacked soldiers opposed to the Chad President, thereby shoring up his position (and in turn giving the French free rein). Noting that such actions 'fall squarely outside the stated objectives of Operation Barkhane', the *Guardian* writes: 'Seen this way, the French presence in the Sahel has more to do with securing French interests than about achieving security for the general public'.[8] Powell (2020) echoes this, arguing that the principal foreign policy priority of France in Africa since 1960 has been maintaining stable African political orders broadly favourable to French interests – these include:

> the prestige associated with influence and power projection in another continent,…maintenance of a constellation of states supportive of French diplomacy… the promotion of French language and culture, business interests and investment opportunities…. as well as concerns over immigration and ….terrorism.

Despite this, there are signs that the cost-benefit balance of keeping troops in the Sahel is shifting for France. At the end of 2020 a new Task Force Takuba of elite troops was set up, following pressure from France on other European countries to contribute to the anti-jihadist effort in Mali. While Estonia and Sweden have already sent some troops for Takuba, others including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and the UK, have made a political commitment to send special forces in March 2021 (*The Defense Post*, 2020). However, 'Takuba is still in its initial stages, and it is not yet clear when the different countries will deploy their troops – with many countries requiring prior parliamentary approval' (*The Defense Post*, 2020).

Five French soldiers, including the first female soldier, were killed by roadside bombs in Mali at the end of 2020, bringing to 50 the number of French troops killed across the Sahel since French military intervention began in 2013 *(The Defense Post*, 2021). Anxious to avoid being mired in a prolonged Afghanistan-style conflict, and with an eye on French presidential elections in 2022, France is reported to be considering drawing down its troops in the region *(The Defense Post*, 2021).

Mali: UN MINUSMA

Following the triple crisis in Mali in 2012 that threatened state collapse – Tuareg separatist rebellion in the north, a military coup, and Islamist armed groups taking over parts of the north of the country – the UN Security Council set up the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2013. MINUSMA's strategic priority was initially focused on the north of the country: its mandate included supporting Mali's transitional authorities in stabilising key population centres and extending state authority throughout Mali, protecting civilians, monitoring abuses and promoting human rights, protecting humanitarian aid and preparing for elections (US CRS, 2019: 12).

In 2013, there was debate in the UN about the wisdom of authorising a peacekeeping mission in the context of threats from transnational Islamist extremist groups (e.g. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), about whether UN personnel would be adequately protected, and whether the mission should have a counterterrorism mandate (US CRS, 2019: 13). In the end, MINUSMA was not given an explicit mandate to conduct

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[8] Reza, A. (20 February 2020). 'Why are French soldiers in the Sahel? Protestors have an answer', *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/20/france-soldiers-sahel-emmanuel-macron-protest (accessed 9 May 2021).

counterterrorism or counterinsurgency operations. Strictly speaking, therefore, MINUSMA is not engaged in counterterrorism, but, in reality, it enables such efforts in several ways:

- Its mandate authorises and supports French (and African) counterterrorist forces.
- MINUSMA shares intelligence and analyses with the parallel forces in Mali.
- With the exception of Mopti base, all MINUSMA camps are contiguous or even shared with those of the Barkhane force.
- MINUSMA provides logistical support (mostly air travel) to French forces where needed.

Charbonneau (2019) argues that this 'division of labour' between MINUSMA and Barkhane undermines the former's peacekeeping role by undermining its impartiality – counterterrorism is grounded in enmity, but UN peacekeepers are not supposed to have enemies.

Unlike most UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, MINUSMA has sizeable Western contingents, including from Canada (134), Germany (381), the Netherlands (116), Norway (92), and Sweden (253) (US CRS, 2019: 13). However, nearby African countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Senegal and Togo), as well as Bangladesh and Egypt, contribute the largest uniformed contingents.

Following the signing of a peace accord between the government and two northern armed group coalitions in 2015, MINUSMA's mandate included supporting implementation of the accord. In 2019, as violence spread to central Mali, a second strategic priority was added of helping the Mali government to restore stability in that region, while also protecting civilians, restoring the presence of the state and promoting political peace initiatives (US CRS, 2019).

In terms of effectiveness, up to 2016 MINUSMA was relatively successful: it managed to improve stability in northern Mali, decrease the number of civilians killed in the conflict, and allow large numbers of displaced persons to return home, as well as supporting the organisation of the 2013 elections and the peace process that led to the 2015 peace accord (van der Lijn, 2019). Van der Lijn (2019) notes that these achievements 'are particularly impressive considering the size of Mali, the logistical challenges, the hostile security environment, and…the relatively limited resources for implementing its vast mandate'.

However, since 2016 its effectiveness has decreased. Mali remains engulfed by violence: according to the UN, attacks have increased fivefold between 2016 and 2020, with 4,000 people killed in 2019, up from about 770 in 2016 (Al-Jazeera, 2020). The number of people forced to leave their homes due to the deteriorating security situation in the region has also gone up, from about 600,000 IDPs in May 2010 to 1.5 million by April 2020 (Al-Jazeera, 2020). As of mid-2019, the peace agreement remained largely un-implemented, while the Islamist insurgency (excluded from the peace process by design) had expanded into previously government-controlled central Mali, as well as neighbouring Burkina Faso and, to a lesser extent, Niger (US CRS, 2019; Al-Jazeera, 2020). 'Jihadist activities and retaliation by government forces have stoked the proliferation of self-defence militias and a vicious cycle of intercommunal violence that has reached unprecedented levels' (van der Lijn, 2019).

Observers have raised alarm over a spate of civilian massacres in central Mali attributed to state security forces and to ethnic militias (with apparent ties to state elements) which could constitute 'ethnic cleansing' (US CRS, 2019: 13). It can be challenging for MINUSMA to monitor human rights abuses by armed groups and security forces, given that the mission works in cooperation with many of those forces (Al-Jazeera, 2020). MINUSMA is also the world's deadliest current UN peacekeeping operation, with 126 personnel (112 from African

contingents) cumulatively killed in 'malicious acts' (roughly 20 per year on average), including at least 20 in the first half of 2019 (US CRS, 2019: 13).

Charbonneau (2019) warns that the overall prognosis in Mali, despite relative stability in the north, is bad, especially because of violence in the centre and south:

> The Malian state is losing ground and the government shows little interest in working towards serious implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement; jihadist elements and various armed groups are governing parts of the country, assuming the role of the state, especially in the centre, and some are spreading south and to neighbouring countries.

Van der Lijn (2019) identifies a number of policy dilemmas facing MINUSMA:

- Whether MINUSA should be decentralised – its civilian component is currently concentrated in Bamako because of logistical and security reasons. While this makes communication with the government easier, it means the majority of the Malian population do not see the benefits of its operations.
- Whether to concentrate its efforts in the north or centre of Mali – central Mali was added to MINUSMA's mandate, while both tasks in the north and resources remained roughly the same. Attention paid to the centre could be at the cost of gains in the north.
- Whether MINUSMA should link more closely with the government – this could be at odds with the tasks associated with implementing the 2015 peace accord, notably protecting human rights. Insufficient inclusiveness and weak governance on the part of the state could fuel instability.
- Whether MINUSMA should support counterterrorism and stabilisation, or focus on politics – current counterterrorism efforts in Mali are problematic given the government's poor human rights and governance record, and its use of ethnic proxy militias to commit atrocities against civilians. However, if MINUSMA only carries out political tasks, the country – and potentially the whole Sahel-West Africa region – could be further destabilised.

Nonetheless, despite the obvious shortcomings and challenges, there is consensus that without MINUSMA, the security situation in Mali – and even the broader Sahel region – would likely be even worse (van der Lijn, 2019; Al-Jazeera, 2020).

G5 Sahel Joint Force

The G5 Sahel was launched in 2014 to improve cooperation on development and security in West Africa. It comprises five countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The G5 Sahel Joint Force was set up in July 2017, with the mandate to combat terrorism, transnational organised crime and human trafficking in the Sahel region.

The plan was for the five countries to deploy 4,500 troops along the southern edge of the Sahara to work alongside France's Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA. Headquartered in Bamako, Mali, the G5 Force at full operating capacity was to have seven battalions spread over three zones (the tri-border area between Mali,

Burkina Faso and Niger; the Mali-Mauritania border; and the Niger-Chad border), covering a strip of 50 km on each side of the countries' borders.[9]

The G5 Sahel Joint Force initiative was spearheaded by France, leading to a UN Security Council Resolution 2359 in June 2017 that called for international logistical, operational and financial support to it. In December 2017, the UN Security Council authorised MINUSMA to provide assistance to the G5 Sahel Force in Malian territory, and it has also been endorsed by the African Union.

However, the initiative has been undermined by lack of resources and capacity. A UN report released in November 2019 noted that, 'The Joint Force continues to face significant training, capability and equipment shortfalls, which hamper its full operationalisation. The lack of air assets, armoured vehicles and transport capabilities and individual protection equipment compounds the threat posed by the use of improvised explosive devices' (cited in Kelly, 2019). In December 2020 it was reported that, despite receiving more than 50 armoured vehicles from partners including the EU, the G5 Force remained critically short in key areas, and that UN troops routinely provided food and fuel for remote G5 Sahel Force bases *(The Defense Post,* 2020). A senior source at the G5 Sahel noted that, 'We don't have the air capability which is vital for anti-terrorist campaigns, or technological means of intelligence' (cited in *The Defense Post*, 2020).

With regard to funding, in July 2019 the EU announced EUR 138 million of additional funds for the force, having previously given EUR 115.6 million (Kelly, 2019). But overall, pledges of hundreds of millions of dollars in financial support for the G5 Sahel Force from international donors (including the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Turkey, as well as European countries and the EU) have been slow to arrive (Kelly, 2019). The UN report noted that, of the more than EUR 430 million pledged, equipment worth EUR 56 million had been delivered as of October 2019 (Kelly, 2019). There have been calls for regular UN funding for the force, but the US has opposed this, preferring bilateral funding for individual states.

These equipment and funding shortages seriously constrain the force's capacity to run effective operations to prevent human smuggling/trafficking.

A further aspect hampering the G5 Sahel Force is its inability to act collectively, as a truly joint force. The G5 troops are supposed to operate in three zones on either side of common borders. While the contingents are based in national territory, the idea was that they would go across borders for operational reasons. However, in reality, 'G5 contingents often respond more to the national command rather than to the force's headquarters' (*The Defense Post*, 2020).

[The G5 Sahel Force has also been involved in efforts to combat irregular migration and TIP – described in the next section.]

Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to combat Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was set up in late 2014-early 2015 in response to the growing threat from Boko Haram and other Islamist extremist groups operating in northern Nigeria and the wider Lake

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[9] *The Defense Post*. 'G5 Sahel', https://www.thedefensepost.com/tag/g5-sahel/.

Chad Basin region. It was formed by the four Lake Chad countries: Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, as well as Benin.[10]

The Boko Haram insurgency affected the north of Nigeria the most, and initially was largely confined to border regions of neighbouring countries. As a result, from 2013 when Nigeria launched military operations to quell the group, leaders in Cameroon, Chad and Niger reacted with caution, largely seeing Boko Haram as a Nigerian problem and focusing on containment (stopping its expansion into their territory) (ICG, 2020).

However, as the violence escalated, from 2014 the three countries deployed more troops in the affected areas and mobilised vigilante groups to counter the jihadists – in turn, prompting more attacks from Boko Haram and further efforts by the respective governments. There was some regional cooperation (e.g. cross-border troop movements), but this was patchy at best. Nigeria was especially reluctant to cooperate with others, because of historic border disputes and other disagreements with its neighbours, and mistrust of external intervention – but there was significant mistrust among all four countries (ICG, 2020).

Ongoing violence, including counter-attacks on national troops by Boko Haram, prompted the change in mindset towards multinational cooperation. In January 2015, the leaders of the affected states, plus Benin, met in Niamey and requested the AU to set up a new MNJTF. The AU authorised the force at the end of January, and it became fully operational by June 2015. The MNJTF had three goals: to create a safe and secure environment in its area of operation; to support (at that time non-existent) 'stabilisation' programmes and enable the return of those displaced by fighting; and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance (ICG, 2020: 5). There were also further tasks, e.g. freeing abductees, promoting human rights, sharing military intelligence. The AU authorised 11,000 troops, and the MNJTF was set up with 8,000 troops from the member states.

A few points are noteworthy about the MNJTF's set-up, as these would resonate throughout its operations (ICG, 2020: 6-7):

- The AU authorised the force but did not mandate it: it thus provides the legal framework for the force to operate and attract funding but does not have an oversight or management role – participating states retain control over the mission.
- The MNTJF's operational area was defined (Lake Chad and some way along the Nigeria-Niger border) – this leaves out large expanses affected by the insurgency, including in Borno State. The operational area is split into four sectors, each controlled by one country (Benin rarely participated in operations).
- Cross-border sectors, which would have allowed more integrated operations, were rejected in favour of sectors situated within individual countries. Each country's contingents thus operate largely on home soil, except for large-scale joint military operations.
- The AU appointed the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) as the political component of the mission – it provides a civilian point of contact for the AU and donors who are reluctant to deal exclusively with a military set-up. Nigerian concerns about external control were also addressed in this way, as

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[10] A previous iteration of the MNJTF was formed in 1998 between Nigeria, Chad and Niger to tackle cross-border crime, but faced operational and other challenges and became dormant (Brubacher et al, 2017).

the LCBC is based in the country and has always had a Nigerian head. However, the LCBC has never had the resources or clout to play its role.

Nigerian concerns about external control also led the MNJTF countries to seek only an endorsement for the MNJTF from the UN Security Council, rather than a mandate – which would have provided greater legitimacy and increased access to resources (Brubacher et al, 2017). The MNJTF had little success in mobilising funding through the UN but was able to secure bilateral support – from the EU and UK (£5 million on set up) as well as France and the US. EU funding was channelled through the AU, which took two years to disburse funds, so for the first two years Nigeria paid for the MNJTF (ICG, 2020: 7-8).

In sum:

> The MNJTF is essentially a counter-insurgency and counterterrorism operation where countries from the region, including Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria undertake their own national operations – mostly within their own borders, and occasionally in hot pursuit across their borders – but in a coordinated manner with a shared political-strategic mandate and a joint multinational headquarters that coordinate the overall effort (de Coning, 2018: 216).

The arrangement of the MNJTF offers considerable advantages to troop-contributing countries (TCCs), allowing them to maintain control over their forces, and not binding them to an AU or UN mandate that would subject their militaries to greater oversight and operational control (Brubacher et al, 2017: 294). For Nigeria it meant it was able to maintain a more effective and durable coalition with its neighbours to fight Boko Haram, than if it had gone through the LCBC alone. The MNJTF also provided legitimacy and allowed TCCs to solicit additional funding and military training, and built goodwill among the international community, which benefitted from the TCCs providing troops and covering most of the operational and political costs (Brubacher et al, 2017).

In terms of effectiveness, the MNJTF has contributed to reducing the threat posed by Boko Haram (ICG, 2020: 1):

> Joint operations, mainly involving Chadian troops deploying into the other countries, helped stem Boko Haram's spread in 2015 and 2016 and squeezed the group, resulting in its split into at least three factions. Short MNJTF offensives in 2017 and 2018, along with a more sustained operation in 2019, also reversed militant gains, freed civilians captured by them or trapped in areas Boko Haram controlled and facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid.

However, most gains against Boko Haram and its offshoots have been short-lived, for a number of reasons: many campaigns were not sustained, though even after a long campaign in 2019 the militants hit back with a March 2020 assault on a camp that killed some 90 Chadian soldiers; jihadists are able to weather offensives by fleeing to other areas; their resilience is also due to the inability of states, especially Nigeria, to follow military operations with efforts to rebuild and improve the lives of people in recaptured areas (ICG, 2020).

The MNJTF's effectiveness is undermined by structural and other constraints (Brubacher et al, 2017; ICG, 2020):

- Its chain of command is weak, even by the standards of multilateral forces, because it is made up of national contingents fighting mostly on home territory. Many troops rotate in and out of the force as national commanders see fit.

- The LCBC is under-resourced and lacks political clout to carry out proper civilian oversight. This, and the lack of an oversight role for the AU or UN, mean these bodies can do little more than urge compliance with international humanitarian law – they cannot curb the abuses carried out by soldiers who are accountable to national hierarchies.

- All the member countries, but especially Nigeria, are wary of fuller integration among the forces. Nigeria essentially sees the MNJTF as a face-saving way to portray operations by other countries' troops (mainly Chad) on Nigerian soil as international cooperation.

- All four countries' forces are stretched thin dealing with multiple security challenges in addition to militancy around Lake Chad. The Chadian President expressed frustration at Chadians doing the bulk of fighting with what he saw as scant support from neighbours, and in December 2019 unilaterally withdrew 1,000 Chadian troops from the MNJTF in Nigeria, weakening it further.

5. African initiatives to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking

Combatting migrant smuggling and human trafficking

General approaches

Measures to tackle migrant smuggling fall into four broad categories: **prevention, protection, prosecution, and – cutting across these – coordination**. Current strategies emphasise prosecution (and to a lesser extent protection), over prevention: little is done to address the underlying reasons that people turn to migrant smuggling and how these intersect with conflict. Responses to trafficking broadly take the same form, but with more extensive protection measures likely for trafficking victims.

In conflict situations, vulnerability to and the risk of human smuggling and trafficking increase hugely. Responses therefore must be proactive rather than reactive, with an even greater focus on prevention and protection. Measures are needed at the very onset of a crisis and should not wait until evidence is available. Conflict can severely erode the state's capacity to fulfil protection obligations to victims/at-risk people, placing a greater onus on international organisations like the UN to fill the gaps.

For effective investigation and prosecution of traffickers/smugglers, all actors involved must understand what trafficking/smuggling are and be able to recognise the different forms. They should be encouraged to gather evidence (notably victim testimony) to support future prosecutions. Victims should not be held liable for crimes they were forced to commit as a direct result of being trafficked.

In conflict situations, civil-military cooperation, and coordination between humanitarian and development actors are important. Responses to trafficking should be mainstreamed in the humanitarian response cluster system.

Recent developments in West Africa

Migration within West Africa as well as to Europe is not a new phenomenon. Migration within West Africa has been happening for decades, including seasonal movement of herders and by people seeking (temporal) relief due to challenges of poverty, climate change, etc. Migration management in relation to human smuggling through West Africa to Europe has been underway for many years.

Over the past decade, however, <u>two aspects have changed: one, the scale of migration</u>, particularly to Europe – which has increased significantly; <u>and two, European acceptance or tolerance of migration</u>, which has diminished significantly. This has had policy implications.

This section gives key frameworks and initiatives by the African Union (and other African actors) to tackle irregular migration and human trafficking, while those by the European Union are outlined in the next section. [Time and resource constraints meant it was not possible to carry out a comprehensive review.] They point to strong collaboration between the AU (and other African actors) and the EU, but also highlight significant differences.

Policies and programmes

Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process, 2006)

The Rabat Process is an inter-regional forum bringing together more than 60 countries from Europe and Northern, Western and Central Africa (but not the African Union) and came out of a meeting of African and European ministers in Rabat in 2006 (Abebe, 2017: 14). The objective was that it would provide a platform for a joint response to the challenges caused by irregular migration flows, and identify opportunities for cooperation, including along the migration route between Western Africa and Europe. The Rabat Process has four thematic pillars: organising mobility and legal migration; improving border management and combatting irregular migration; strengthening the synergies between migration and development; and promoting international protection. It thus takes a comprehensive approach to migration issues. Consultation takes place at three levels: ministerial conferences, senior official meetings, and thematic meetings, and an evolving set of subjects on migration and development are deliberated (Abebe, 2017).

Ouagadougou Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings Especially Women and Children

Also in 2006, the EU and AU concluded the Ouagadougou Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings Especially Women and Children, which is particularly concerned with sex tourism and other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children (Abebe, 2017: 17). It stresses the importance of a comprehensive regional and international approach to prevent and combat TIP. It lists a number of general principles as well as practical measures, including legal, policy and institutional frameworks aimed at addressing the challenges posed by human trafficking. Activities to be undertaken at national level include (Abebe, 2017: 17):

- prevention and awareness raising;
- victim protection and assistance;
- provision of information on legal and other rights in countries of destination;
- due process regarding the prosecution of perpetrators of human trafficking and encouraging victims to testify against those who commit such crimes;
- provision of medical assistance.

The Action Plan underscores the importance of cooperation and coordination at national and regional levels between different countries (of origin, transit and destination) and among governments, inter-governmental, international and non-governmental actors and CSOs; and the exchange of documentation on experiences and lessons learned regarding different facets of human trafficking (Abebe, 2017: 17). Moreover, it calls for states to develop regional action plans and for the establishment of a multi-stakeholder follow-up mechanism to combat trafficking and mobilise resources to the same end.

AU Commission Initiative against Trafficking (AU.COMMIT)

In 2009 the African Union launched the AU Commission Initiative against Trafficking (AU.COMMIT), a continental campaign against human trafficking, focused on prevention, prosecution of traffickers and protection of victims (Abebe, 2017: 4). AU.COMMIT hoped to galvanise activities undertaken by the AU Commission, including global, regional and national initiatives on more synergised and coordinated actions to

combat TIP in Africa (Abebe, 2017: 12). ECOWAS was one of the regions where the campaign was launched. AU.COMMIT is guided by five core principles:

- a victim protection approach
- the best interest of the child
- empowerment of women and girls
- the root cause approach
- respect for AU and UN conventions

Its implementation plan follows a three-pronged approach, referred as the 'Three P Strategies': prevention of trafficking; protection of victims of trafficking; and prosecution of those involved in human trafficking and related forms of abuse. Both 'hard' and 'soft' tools are used: the former refers to legal reform, prosecution of criminals, disruption of crime networks, and coordination among countries of destination, transit, and origin; the latter consists of socio-economic development, poverty reduction, prevention, and protection of victims of human trafficking (Abebe, 2017: 12).

Joint Africa-EU Declaration on Migration and Development (Tripoli Process, 2006)

This declaration did involve the African Union. Significantly, it is also cognisant of the nexus between migration and peace and security. It highlights a number of areas of cooperation in this regard, e.g. cooperating in crisis management operations; strengthening Africa's capacity to prevent and peacefully resolve conflicts; and ensuring post-conflict reconstruction at both the regional and sub-regional level through, inter alia, providing logistical support and availing funds for peacekeeping in a predictable manner (Abebe, 2017: 16). Specifically on illegal migration and TIP, the declaration underlines the need to (Abebe, 2017: 17):

- Support capacity building and projects in countries of origin and transit;
- Bolster national legislation to criminalise these activities;
- Implement the EU–Africa Joint Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children;
- Encourage cooperation among various relevant stakeholders, including agreements on pertinent issues related to illegal migrants;
- Cooperate on developing border control measures;
- Conduct information campaigns targeting the local population and youth on the risks of illegal migration and trafficking

It also includes measures to facilitate regular migration, and looks at safeguarding refugees via regional protection, implementing relevant conventions, creating favourable conditions for returnees, and ensuring due access to an asylum process.

Impact

The above frameworks by the African Union (and other groupings of African countries) reflect a recognition of the complexity of irregular migration and TIP, and the need for a 'holistic' approach addressing all aspects of the issues. As noted, this review found little evidence of the impact of these frameworks.

However, as with AU efforts to build a peace and security architecture in the continent, the literature highlights resource constraints which hamper the ability to implement frameworks and policies. Welz (2016: 109) points to both lack of staff in the AU to work on migration issues, and to its dependence on donor funding. Furthermore, he argues that the AU is dependent on regional economic frameworks such as ECOWAS to implement its policies, which are in turn dependent on their member states. '(C)apacities and resources among the Member States vary starkly. While some countries, such as South Africa and Egypt, can afford to manage migration, others have no funds to do this or are unwilling to engage in the issue' (Welz, 2016: 110). With reference to the AU migration frameworks, Klavert notes that '[s]ome commentators argue that presenting the frameworks as guidelines was the only way to get them adopted, as there was no political traction to adopt anything more powerful' (cited in Welz, 2016: 110).

6. EU initiatives to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking

Approach

As the scale of migration from West Africa to Europe has increased, and as European tolerance of this has decreased, there has been a **change in emphasis in EU policies and programming**. EU engagement in the Sahel predates the migrant crisis of 2014-2015. The first EU Sahel Strategy in 2011 laid out a vision of security explicitly linked to development, through four pillars: preventing and countering radicalisation; improving economic and social conditions for young people; managing migration, mobility and border issues; and fighting illicit trafficking and organised crime (Lebovich, 2018: 5). However, as the migrant crises in the Mediterranean and Europe gained prominence, there has been a marked shift in emphasis to security rather than development. Boas (2020: 2) notes that development-related activities have not vanished from EU programming in the Sahel – the EU is still the largest provider of development and humanitarian assistance to the Sahel – but 'a new focus on the security-migration nexus is emerging as the main frame for the EU's policy engagement in the region'.

Europe's response to migrant smuggling and human trafficking has predominantly been a 'securitised' one. 'Securitisation of migration occurs when migration is seen as a security threat to a state or society' (Abebe, 2019: 2). Securitisation entails, in particular, enhancing border controls and tightening visa policies. The securitisation of migration in the Sahel is evident from EU policies and programmes in the region (e.g. the Joint Valletta Action Plan), and the deployment of European troops in African countries. EU policymakers have focused on Niger and Mali to stem migration to Europe, especially as the instability and lack of a unified government in Libya have made collaboration with that country difficult (Abebe, 2019: 7). Pressure/incentives from Europe have also led African governments to take a securitised approach to migration. A brief description of key responses is given below, followed by an assessment of their impact and effectiveness.

Policies and programmes

European Neighbourhood Policy

The revised European Neighbourhood Policy in 2015, which involves seven African countries (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Western Sahara) outlines migration and security as among the EU's major areas of cooperation, with key focus issues being policing, border security and counter-terrorism (Abebe, 2019: 6).

Joint Valletta Action Plan

The Valletta (Malta) Summit on Migration in November 2015 brought together European and African leaders to discuss the European migrant crisis. At the summit the EU committed to help promote development in African countries, while African leaders pledged action to reduce the flow of refugees. The key objectives of the Joint Valletta Action Plan, agreed at the summit, were: 'addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement; prevention of and fight against irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and return, readmission and reintegration' (Abebe, 2019: 6). It includes proposals to step up military cooperation and assistance, e.g. equipment provision, intelligence sharing and communication networks for maritime surveillance – Abebe (2019) notes that these provide many commercial opportunities

for the military and security industry. As seen below, most programmes developed under the Valletta Agreement are securitised measures.

EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF)

The EUTF was set up to finance and implement the Valletta Action Plan. The objective of the EUTF for Africa is to 'foster stability by addressing root causes of conflict, forced displacement and irregular migration, and thereby contribute to better migration management' (Boas, 2020: 7). The EUR 4.5 billion Fund operates in three regions of Africa: the Horn of Africa (EUR 1406.1 million), North Africa (EUR 659.2 million), and the Sahel/Lake Chad Basin (EUR 1953.2 million) (Boas, 2020: 7). It concentrates on tackling human smuggling and trafficking through enhanced border controls – Abebe (2019) argues that this takes the focus away from long-term development solutions.

Boas (2020) cites two examples of EUTF programmes to illustrate the focus on security rather than development. The EUR 29 million Programme d'Appui au Renforcement de la Sécurité (PARSEC) improves security and border management along the Mali-Burkina Faso border. The Groupes d'Action Rapides – Surveillance et Intervention au Sahel (GAR-SI) is a EUR 41.6 million initiative to train specialised counterterrorist/transnational organised crime units within the G5 (see below) countries' gendarmeries: these will be mobile, flexible, autonomous units controlling border areas and with the authority to make arrests. Boas (2020) questions how much PARSEC support, while needed, 'really has to do with the root causes of instability, conflict and migration', and warns that, while the GAR-SI might sound like an efficient mechanism to restore the reach of the state in peripheral border regions, it carries the potential to increase administrative corruption and make the lives of local people harder, thereby fuelling resentment towards the state (and its external supporters).

G5 Sahel

As seen above, the G5 Sahel is a regional body set up in 2014 by the leaders of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, to strengthen regional cooperation on security and development. It aims to identify common projects focused on food security, agriculture and pastoralism, infrastructure and national security – all important in the context of root causes of conflict in the region (Boas, 2020). G5 Sahel thus has the potential to provide a functional framework for security and development cooperation in the Sahel and is being supported by external stakeholders, notably the EU (Boas, 2020). However, EU support is directed largely at security aspects, notably the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and far less on the development parts of the G5 Sahel agenda. Moreover, the G5 Force, for which half a billion dollars has been pledged, will be used largely for improved border control and to stop northward migration as well as to combat 'jihadist terrorists' who threaten global security – in other words, to address the security concerns of the EU and other external stakeholders (Boas, 2020: 9). Boas (2020: 9) concludes: 'The EU pledge of support for the Sahel is thus in fact a pledge of support for European political stability, and not necessarily for sustainable investment in a peace, reconciliation and development agenda for the Sahel'.

EUCAP Sahel

The EU Capacity and Assistance Programme (EUCAP) has two national chapters. EUCAP Niger was launched in 2012 to support the Nigerien security forces and strengthen their capacities; since 2016 its mandate has increasingly focused on improved border management (including a permanent field office in Agadez), on the basis that irregular migration and trafficking are 'threats (which) endanger both local populations and

European citizens' (Boas, 2020: 9). EUCAP Mali was set up in 2015 to support the restoration of state authority in Mali, e.g. through support for the police, gendarmerie and national guard to implement security sector reform. Since 2017 and its renewed mandate, there is greater emphasis on counterterrorism and support to combat irregular migration and trafficking, and border control (Boas, 2020). Boas (2020: 10) concludes that this continues a trend by the EU: 'a multi-dimensional crisis is reduced to narrow security concerns, more aligned to short-term European needs than aiming for a long-term, sustainable solution to the crisis in the Sahel'.

EU Training Mission

The European Union Training Mission (EUTM) was set up in 2013 to support the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) to restore state authority across the country – the country's military had been buffeted by a Tuareg rebellion, jihadist occupation of the north and the 2012 coup (Lebovich, 2018: 10). The mission comprises almost 600 service personnel, mostly stationed at a training camp outside the capital Bamako; they do not take part in FAMA combat operations but focus on providing training (Boas, 2020: 10). Vast EU resources have been spent on this, but an absence of monitoring and evaluation makes it difficult to assess impact (Lebovich, 2018). Nonetheless, Lebovich (2018: 13) notes that EUTM has 'clearly failed to prevent Malian troops from engaging in human rights violations – which continue to drive recruitment to jihadist groups…. deficiencies stem from the fact that EUTM has focused on questions of technical support and capacity building rather than real reform, governance and strategic planning'.

Military deployment in Africa

EU member states have deployed military forces in African countries in order to deter migration. Examples include the British government sending troops to Sierra Leone in early 2017 for training and joint exercises, and another mission to train Tunisian armed forces in border security; and the deployment of Italian troops in North Africa in December 2017 to stop migration (Abebe, 2019). French troops have been deployed in Niger in the context of the war on terror. Abebe (2019: 7) argues that the presence of foreign troops in Africa to deter migration 'further complicates the already troubled peace and security dynamics of the continent….(and) undermines the continent's effort of demilitarisation through African Union initiatives such as "silencing the guns by 2020"'.

Niger Law 036

In 2015 the EU pushed the government of Niger to pass the Law against the Illicit Smuggling of Migrants (Law 036). This criminalises migrant smuggling, making all forms of support to facilitate the crossing of an international border without legal authorisation in exchange for profit illegal, and imposes high penalties, including imprisonment, confiscation of property and removal from public office (Boas, 2020). In practice, efforts at enforcement have focused on Agadez (Abebe, 2019) leading to serious detrimental effects on the local economy (see below). Boas (2020) also claims that initially the law was not enforced equally, with some groups – notably the historically marginalised Tebu group – targeted more than the Tuareg who control the administration in Agadez and have close ties to the government in Niamey. He questions what will happen when the EU pressures the government to take action against its Tuareg allies.

Impact

The 'securitisation of migration' approach taken by the EU in the Sahel has had questionable effects in terms of reducing irregular migration along the West Africa route to Europe. It has also had largely detrimental effects in the Sahel countries themselves. In the long-term this could lead to negative knock-on effects in Europe.

Impact on local economies

In response to EU pressure, Sahel governments carried out a crackdown on illegal migration, notably in Agadez in Niger. Hundreds of alleged traffickers were arrested and their vehicles confiscated, and aggressive tactics were used 'to block well-trodden migration routes to Libya and, to a lesser extent, Algeria' (Lebovich, 2018). This has led to loss of critical livelihoods and sources of income.

Agadez had become a 'boom town' because of the services it provided to migrants seeking to travel to Europe: transport, food, accommodation, etc. Income from the 'migration industry' served as a substitute for residents following the decline of Agadez's major economic sectors – tourism, mining, agriculture – over the past decade (Abebe, 2019). Migrant smuggling provided extra income not only for the residents of Agadez 'but also for people who came from near and far to take part in the bonanza of the transit migration hub' (Boas, 2020: 12). All of this has been disrupted by the securitised approach to migration being pushed by the EU. In the words of a local taxi driver in Agadez (cited in Boas, 2020: 11):

> Before, in almost all the neighbourhoods where migrants were staying, the population of these neighbourhoods benefited. In addition, there were traders, motel owners and the people who housed them that benefited. Now all these things have changed, it is not like before. […] It was the international community that prevented migrants from coming.

Boas (2020: 11) highlights the divergent perspectives of local residents and the EU/international community: what the latter see as security risks 'may just be a way of life locally: a livelihood strategy due to the lack of other possibilities to earn a living'. Current policies and programmes largely fail to take into account the damage done to local economies and people who depended on migration for their livelihoods, e.g. by supporting local development and job creation. The EUTF does reserve considerable funding for long-term socioeconomic development, including EUR 243 million from 2016-2020 to support agricultural projects, but implementation has been slow (Abebe, 2019: 8). In Niger, the EU 'has provided only a small percentage of the funding and assistance it promised to these people, creating enormous frustration among locals' (Lebovich, 2018).

Impact on movement of people within Africa

The curbs on irregular migration also make intra-African migration harder. Some countries have introduced stricter border controls, e.g. between Algeria and Morocco. Lebovich (2018) notes that restrictions are problematic given the long history of migration as a way of life in the Sahel and Sahara, and the fact that citizens of the 15 countries of ECOWAS are supposed to be guaranteed freedom of movement. Molenaar (2017a: 2) echoes the former point: 'The danger exists that intraregional migration patterns—a true (temporal) escape valve for people facing climatic challenges and poverty—will be undermined due to current efforts to stop all migration'. On the latter, Boas (2020: 6) also points out that ECOWAS citizens should be free to move all the way to the borders of Algeria and Libya – 'this is a right that the EU in effect has tried to undermine'.

Impact on irregular migration

Given the general failure of EU programmes and initiatives to tackle the underlying factors driving irregular migration, it is perhaps no surprise that this has not been curbed. Moreover, the loss of livelihoods detailed above is driving more people to attempt to migrate to Europe (Abebe, 2019), or could push them to become involved in organised crime/armed groups (Boas, 2020). Most of those who were arrested or had their trucks confiscated in the security crackdown were 'small fish' – essentially local people who provided services to earn income; their removal has consolidated the migration industry into the hands of more criminal and exploitative actors, who are less likely to treat migrants decently (Molenaar, 2017b: 4). It has thus 'professionalised' the practice.

Migrant smugglers have adapted by changing their routes, avoiding Agadez and going further north through Algeria into Libya instead. This is both a longer and more dangerous route, which means that migrants have to pay higher fees to smugglers, and are at more risk of dying (Molenaar, 2017a: 13). Nigerien smugglers on the frontline have also been replaced by Sudanese who smuggle migrants through Chad and Sudan (Darfur) to Libya: again the new routes are longer, more dangerous and more expensive – five times more expensive (Abebe, 2019: 8).

In addition, the EU's determination to curb irregular migration has given a 'green light' to regimes in the region to (further) exploit migrants, notably in Algeria and Libya. Abebe (2019: 8) claims that the crackdown in Agadez, coupled with the EU pledging EUR 90 million to Libya for enhanced migration management, contributed to the slavery issue in Libya. In sum, the securitisation policies have increased migrants' vulnerability and risks, while 'ultimately expanding the smuggling business' (Abebe, 2019: 8).

Impact on citizen-government relations

For communities living along transnational smuggling routes, the loss of livelihoods caused by the clamp down on irregular migration, and the failure of the state to provide alternative jobs is likely to cause resentment and further undermine citizen-state relations. Officials in Agadez report: 'They [citizens] ask us why we work for the EU rather than for them, the people who got us elected' (cited in Abebe, 2019: 9). Abebe (2019: 9) adds that, 'it shouldn't be expected that African governments' cooperation to stem migration be viewed positively by citizens'.

The security crackdown in Agadez has also created greater opportunities for police corruption. Molenaar (2017b: 4) notes that security forces in the region have a long history of benefiting financially from taxing irregular migration at roadblocks along the main migration routes. However, the criminalisation of any support to irregular migration has exacerbated this, 'as the price of bribes has gone up to match the increased police actions against human smugglers'. This further erodes citizens' trust in the police, and thus in the state.

At the same time, the EU's dependence on Sahel country governments to implement its policies and curb irregular migration greatly limits its capacity to engage with those leaders on governance reform. Lebovich (2018: 8-9) notes that both governments in Niger and Mali play on EU fears, warning that the Sahel is a dam which must not burst – otherwise Europe will be submerged. 'As such, the EU remains attentive to a Nigerien government that has repeatedly harassed the domestic opposition even as the foreign presence *(EU officials)* in Niger expands' (Lebovich, 2018: 8-9).

In sum, the EU's approach to irregular migration from West Africa is focused on security measures to stop the flow of people, rather than on support for development (job creation, infrastructure, services, governance,

etc.) to address the drivers or migration from the region. However, as seen, the approach has been massively detrimental to local communities dependent on the migration industry. The resultant loss of livelihoods – exacerbated by the failure to provide alternative income sources – is fuelling criminality and instability, and actually exacerbating migration drivers. It is also further undermining citizen-state relations in already fragile states. In the long-term there is a real danger of regional instability and conflict, which in turn could fuel vastly increased irregular migration to Europe (Abebe, 2019; Boas, 2020). Boas (2020: 15) warns: 'the current approach that seems to give priority to immediate EU interests may, in the long run, achieve the opposite'.

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