



Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: West Africa



This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the West Africa (WA) region. The core countries of focus for this region are Senegal, Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and the coastal countries. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to any of the countries over the rest.

The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions.

MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels. For more information on MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

MMC's understanding of mixed migration

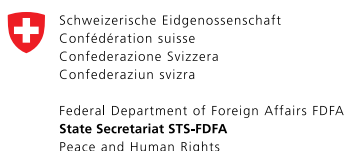
“Mixed migration” refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people engaged in mixed migration have a range of legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Mixed migration describes migrants travelling along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly, and wholly or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

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Jean-Baptiste Joire (2017)

Women watching boats in Joal-Fadiout, Senegal, February 2017.

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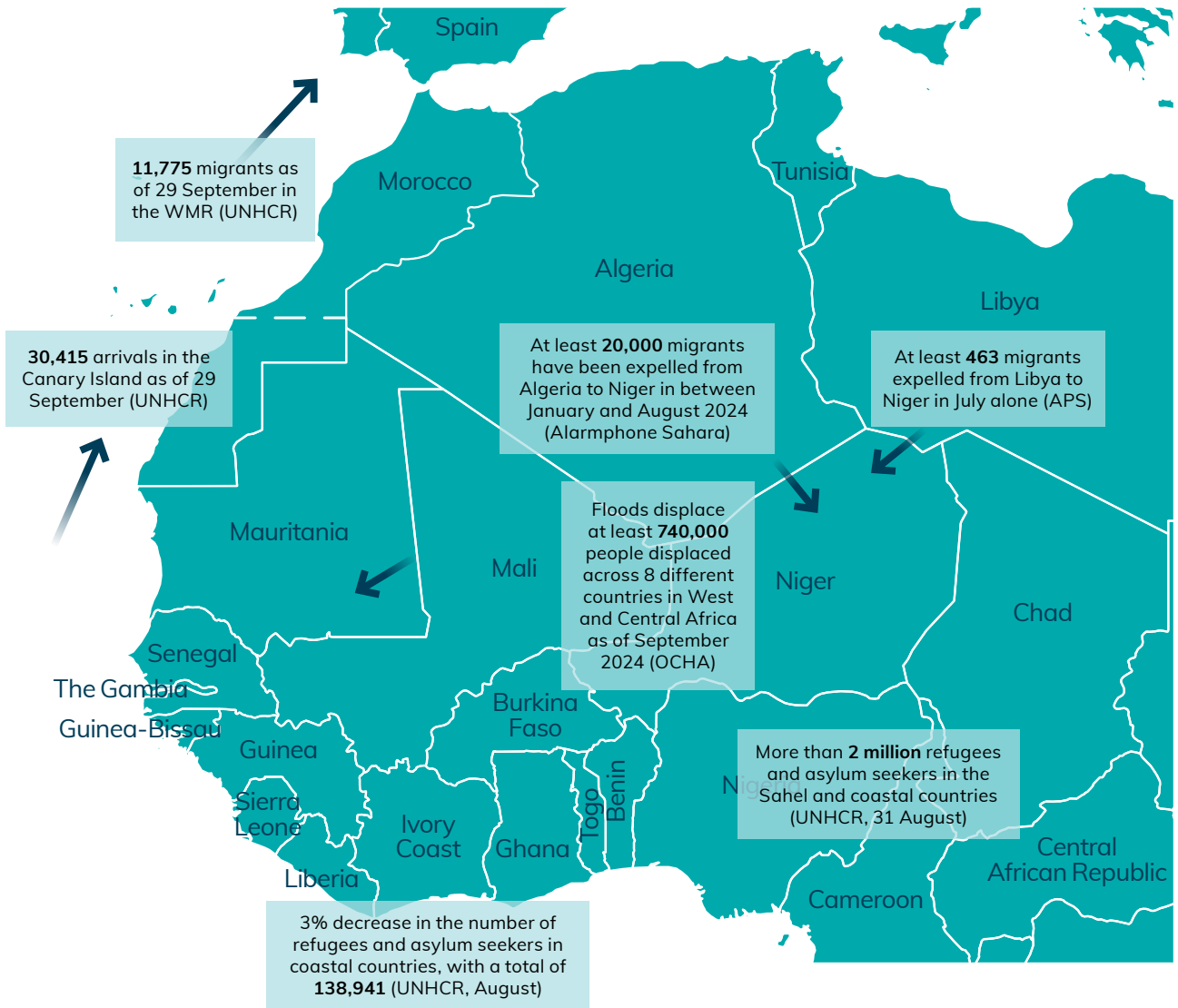
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Quarter 3 - 2024

Key Updates

- **Floods across West and Central Africa displaced more than 740,000 people:** The floods have impacted at least [4.4 million](#) people and compounded an already severe food crisis in the region, with the number of people facing hunger [rising](#) to 55 million. The [UNHCR](#) has emphasized the need to include refugees and IDPs in humanitarian responses, as they are often living in precarious conditions with limited access to essential services.
- **Senegal intensifies migration control efforts:** Senegal continues to intensify its efforts to intercept irregular migrants leaving its shores. In a coordinated effort between various security and defence forces, Senegalese authorities launched "[Operation Djoko](#)" on 15 August, aimed at preventing irregular departures from multiple coastal sites.
- **Spain strengthens cooperation with West African countries through MoUs on circular migration:** In August, the President of the Spanish government conducted a three-day visit to [Mauritania](#), [Senegal](#), and The [Gambia](#), signing MoUs with each country on [circular migration](#). These agreements allow workers to temporarily migrate to Spain for employment to address labour shortages.
- **The European Union strengthens Mauritania's migration control capabilities amid new legislation:** In July, the EU approved a €15 million grant to the Mauritanian Armed Forces in order to enhance their surveillance and deterrence capabilities. [Critics](#) warn that the focus on deterrence could lead to increased interceptions at sea, potentially [endangering](#) the lives of migrants and exposing them to human rights [violations](#). In parallel, Mauritania tightened its immigration laws in September 2024. The National Assembly [adopted](#) draft law 24-029, which introduces stricter penalties and provides a legal basis for expelling immigrants who violate immigration laws.
- **Côte d'Ivoire and Morocco revised travel policies:** On 14 August, Côte d'Ivoire announced the [reinstatement of visas](#) for citizens traveling to Morocco. The decision reversed a longstanding free movement agreement, citing concerns about counterfeit passports and increasing irregular migration to Europe.
- **On 6 July 2024, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso formalized the Confederation of the Sahel States (AES):** The three leaders emphasized an "[irrevocable](#)" break from ECOWAS. These developments introduce [uncertainties](#) in regional mixed migration dynamics, particularly concerning the loss of access to ECOWAS's 1979 Protocol on Free Movement of Persons (FMP).

Regional Overview*



*Information on the map relates to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration movements within and out of West Africa and North Africa.

Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Northbound mixed migration

Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Route

According to [UNHCR](#), as of 29 September, Spain registered 42,190 irregular arrivals representing a 57% increase compared to the same period in 2023 (including 16,940 people during the period [30 June](#) to [29 September](#)). Most arrivals are recorded in the Canary Islands with a decline of sea arrivals to the Spanish Peninsula and Balearic Islands, according to [Spanish Ministry data](#). However, land arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla have increased this quarter.

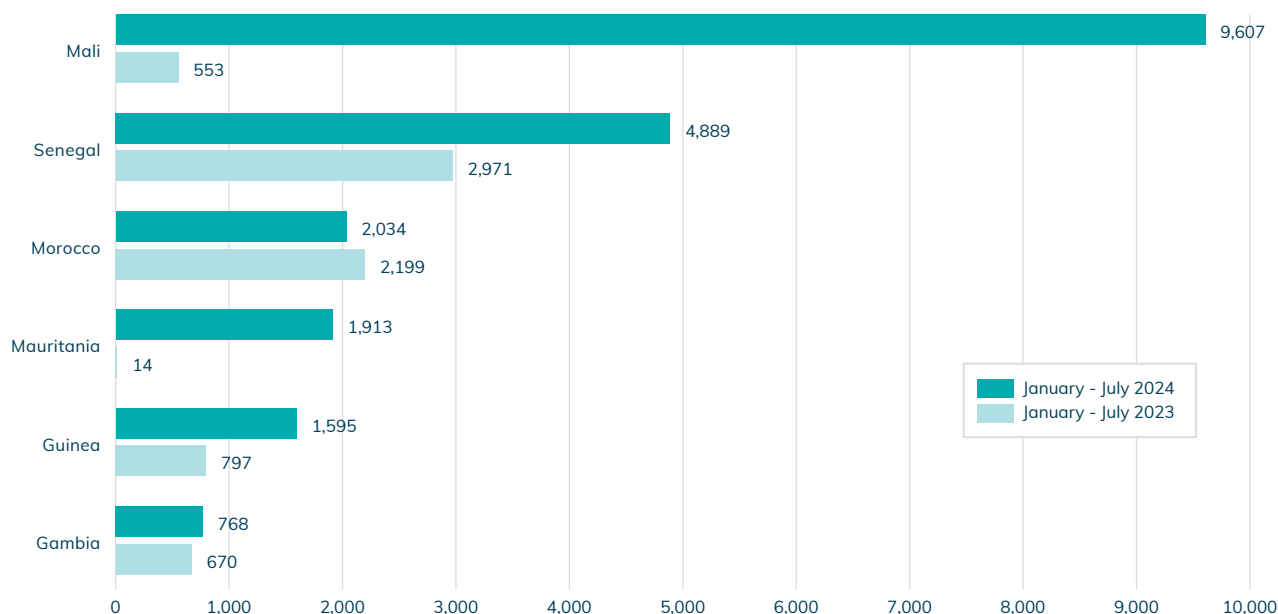
On the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands, arrivals [increased](#) by 102% compared to the same period last year, reaching 30,415 as of 29 September (10,938 for this quarter only). The WMR overall saw a 0.5% increase of arrivals compared to the same period last year, totalling 11,775 as of 29 September (6,002 for this quarter). However, sea arrivals to the Spanish Peninsula and Balearic Islands [dropped](#) from 10,011 between January and 15 September 2023 to 9,084 over the same period in 2024. Regarding arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla, the [Ministry data](#) reveals an increase of land arrivals, rising from 829 to 2,088 most occurred in Ceuta (from 717 to 2,026).¹

According to [Frontex](#) data for the first eight months of 2024, the top five countries of origin for migrants arriving via the Atlantic Route are Mali (10,118), Senegal (4,963), followed by Morocco (2,150), and Mauritania (1,915). On the Western Mediterranean route, Algeria and Morocco remain the top two countries of origin, consistent with the previous quarter.²

¹ Melilla arrivals decreased from 112 (January – 15 September 2023) to 62 (January – 15 September 2024)

² For more information on the increase of arrivals to Spain from Algeria, please consult the North Africa Q3 2024 QMMU.

Figure 1. Arrivals in the Canary Islands via the Atlantic Route by nationality – from January until July 2023 and January until July 2024



Source: [Frontex Migratory Map](#)

As Table 1 below shows, four West African countries registered significant increases in migration to the Canary Islands. Mauritania experienced the largest increase, followed by Mali, which also saw a notable rise. Guinea and Senegal registered a 100% and a 64% increase, respectively.

Table 1: Arrivals in the Canary Islands via the Atlantic Route by nationality – from January until July 2023 and January until July 2024

Country of origin	January - July 2023	January - July 2024	Percentage Increase
Mali	553	9,607	1,637%
Senegal	2971	4,889	64%
Mauritania	14	1,913	13,564%
Guinea	797	1,595	100%

Source: [Frontex Migratory Map](#)

Central Mediterranean Route (arrivals to Italy)

As of 29 September, Italy [recorded](#) 49,308 irregular sea arrivals, a 63% decrease compared to the same period last year. From 30 June to 29 September, 23,504 individuals reached Italy. The largest group of arrivals consisted of Bangladeshis (21%), followed by Syrians (17%), Tunisians (14%), Egyptians (6%), and Guineans (6%). The majority (61%) of those arriving by sea departed from Libya (30,143), followed by 32% from Tunisia (15,800).

The share of West Africans departing from North Africa has declined compared to the same period [last year](#). Guinea's share decreased from 14% to 6%, and Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, which were at 14% and 6% respectively last year, no longer appear in the top ten countries of origin. Mali experienced a slight decrease of 1 percentage point, from 4% to 3%. The Gambia, which was not on the list last year, now accounts for 3% of West African departures from North Africa.

This [decrease](#) can be partly attributed to increased interceptions on Tunisian shores. Although these interceptions target both Tunisians and non-Tunisians, they disproportionately affect sub-Saharan African migrants. For instance, according to a Tunisian [CSO](#), between January and July 2024, 80% of interceptions in Tunisia were Sub-Saharan African migrants. Given the recent increase in departures from West African countries like Senegal and Mauritania, coupled with restrictions on the North African route for Sub-Saharan African migrants, many have sought alternative paths, redirecting their journeys toward the Atlantic route.

Dead or missing refugees and migrants³

According to the [IOM's Missing Migrants Project](#) (MMP), as of 2 October, at least 436 migrants have lost their lives or gone missing while attempting to cross the Atlantic Ocean to Spain. Of these, 233 died or disappeared during the third quarter of 2024. On the Western Mediterranean Route (WMR), 254 individuals have been reported missing or dead, including 51 in the third quarter. On the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), at least 1,158 people have died or gone missing as of 2 October, including 279 during this quarter. [La Vanguardia](#) reports that when comparing the number of deaths with the number of survivors on each route, they find that this year, the Canary Route has one death for every 31 survivors, the Central Mediterranean has one for every 48, and the Western Mediterranean one for every 72. This [indicates](#) that the death rate on the Atlantic is 55% higher than that on the Mediterranean.

Mixed migration within and to the West Africa region⁴

As of August 2024, according to [UNHCR data](#), there were more than 5.1 million people of concern⁵ in the Sahel, totaling 5,157,576 individuals. Among these, 3,120,078 were internally displaced persons (IDPs), reflecting a 3% increase since [June 2024](#).⁶ At that time, the total number of refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs stood at 5,066,690, with 3,020,070 being IDPs. In contrast, the overall refugee and asylum-seeker population has grown at a slower pace. This rise in IDPs can likely be attributed to recent [attacks](#) in [Niger](#), [Mali](#), and [Burkina Faso](#), alongside [severe rains and flooding](#) across the region.

3 Numbers in this section are drawing on IOM's MMP and based on MMC calculations made accessing the website on 26 September 2024. IOM acknowledges that these numbers represent an underestimation, as many deaths/disappearances remain undocumented.

4 The variation in the total number of people of concern reported in previous quarters does not necessarily indicate a change over time. Instead, it results from a shift in data reporting methodology, which now relies on a single source of information.

5 The figures reported reflect the number of IDPs in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger, as well as refugees dispersed throughout the Sahel region. They also include the number of refugees from the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) and in the neighboring coastal countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

6 In [June 2024](#), the total number of refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs stood at 5,066,690, with 3,020,070 being IDPs.

Refugees and asylum seekers in coastal countries

According to UNHCR figures, there was an estimated total of 138,941 refugees (58,842) and asylum seekers (80,099) in the coastal countries of [Côte d'Ivoire](#) (61,343), [Ghana](#) (12,125), [Togo](#) (48,331) and [Benin](#) (17,142) as of 31 August 2024. This compares to 143,806 recorded refugees and asylum seekers as of May 2024, representing a 3% decrease. The most notable changes are in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana which witnessed a 16% increase and a 48% decrease, respectively.

Floods in West and Central Africa drive displacement

Recent floods across West and Central Africa have internally displaced more than 740,000 people, deepening ongoing humanitarian crises driven by conflict and [climate change](#). According to [OCHA](#), as of 22 September, more than 4.4 million people across 15 countries have been affected. This compounds an already severe food crisis, with the number of people facing hunger in the region rising to at least [55 million](#)—four times the figure from five years ago.

The [UNHCR](#) has emphasized the need to include refugees and IDPs in humanitarian responses, as they are often living in precarious conditions with limited access to essential services. According to a MMC key informant, in Niger, the floods and heavy rains disrupted migration. Key transit routes, such as those between Niamey, Agadez, and Zinder, were blocked, disrupting refugees' and IDPs' plans. For people in transit, the situation became costly, as prolonged waiting increases financial strain, affecting those with limited resources.

Mali faces rising violence and displacement

Over the past few months, Mali has [experienced](#) an escalation in violence, marked by a series of attacks involving non-state armed groups and the Malian army and its allies, involving [foreign mercenaries](#). This has triggered forced population [movements](#) both within the country and across its borders.

In [July](#), for instance, an attack in Tinzaouatene, located in the Kidal region near the Algerian border, resulted in the deaths of at least 21 civilians. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ([ACLED](#)), this rise in violence has been accompanied by an escalation of [civilian](#) targeting, particularly [against nomadic populations](#) in the Kidal region. August saw a 5% [increase](#) in attacks compared to July, culminating in an [attack](#) in September on a military police training facility and a military base near Bamako's airport, killing at least 70 individuals.

The ongoing violence has contributed to an [increase](#) in forced displacement. Following the attacks in Tinzaouatene, MMC key informants observed that both migrants and local populations are fleeing from the north to the central regions of Mali. Despite previous reports of refoulement, many individuals have also sought refuge in Algeria, although estimating their numbers remains challenging. Additionally, as of August, Médecins Sans Frontières ([MSF](#)) reported that several villages in northern Mali have been almost emptied out of their inhabitants due to the violence. Similar observations have been noted in the village of [Diallaye](#), located in the Mopti region.

Benin Parliament approves law recognizing Afro-descendant nationality

In [May](#) 2024, the Council of Ministers of Benin submitted a [draft law](#) to parliament proposing to recognize Beninese nationality for "Afro-descendants," [defined](#) as individuals with sub-Saharan African ancestry who were forcibly taken during the transatlantic slave trade. The [law](#) will allow eligible individuals to obtain Beninese nationality, an official certificate of nationality, and a Beninese passport. The law outlines various methods to prove Afro-descendant status, including civil documents and DNA tests. Full citizenship and the right to hold public office will be granted after five years of residence in Benin. The law is awaiting presidential approval before coming into effect.

Senegal intensifies migration control efforts

In line with what was reported [last quarter](#), Senegal continues to intensify its efforts to intercept irregular migrants attempting to reach Europe. In a coordinated effort between various security and defence forces, Senegalese authorities launched "[Operation Djoko](#)" on 15 August, aimed at preventing irregular departures from multiple coastal sites. According to the [authorities](#), the "Dioko" operation led to the arrest of 690 migrants, including 21 facilitators. According to the same source, the Senegalese Navy apprehended 9,131 individuals in 2023 while, as of September 2024, they have detained 4,198 people.

Following a shipwreck off the coast of [Mbour](#), Western Senegal in early September, which resulted in the loss of at least [39](#) lives, the Senegalese President has [vowed](#) to enforce stricter penalties for smugglers and stressed the importance of creating local opportunities to deter individuals from undertaking such journeys. Nevertheless, [critics](#) argue that security measures alone may not address the factors driving migration. This sentiment was reflected in a report by [France 24](#), where a survivor of the shipwreck indicated that such incidents would not deter their attempts, highlighting the determination of individuals to undertake this migration journey despite being aware of the risks involved. Critics also [argue](#) that despite the regime change in Senegal, the socioeconomic challenges facing the youth and motivating migration remain unaddressed.

Spain strengthens cooperation with West African countries through MoUs on circular migration

The President of the Spanish government conducted a three-day visit to Mauritania, The Gambia, and Senegal in August, to discuss migration in the region. The [visit](#) comes within Spain's strategy to enhance cooperation with key West African countries and promote a balanced approach to migration, focusing on migration management while recognizing Spain's demand for migrant workers.

Key outcomes of the visit included the signing of MoUs with [Mauritania](#), [Senegal](#), and The [Gambia](#) on [circular migration](#).⁷ These new agreements build upon earlier initiatives, such as the [2021 MoU](#) signed between Spain and Senegal, which also facilitated circular migration. These agreements allow workers to temporarily migrate to Spain for employment in sectors such as agriculture to address labour shortages. After their work period, recruited individuals are expected to return to their home countries. Additionally, Spain committed to strengthening security cooperation with local forces to counter human trafficking and smuggling networks. Spain also outlined plans for long-term investments in development and education aimed at preventing migration. The visit sparked [political debate](#) in Spain, with opposition parties expressing concerns that such initiatives might encourage further migration.

The EU strengthens Mauritania's migration control capabilities

In July, the European Union (EU) strengthened its cooperation with Mauritania by approving a €15 million grant to the Mauritanian Armed Forces, funded through the [European Peace Facility](#) (EPF). This financial support is aimed at enhancing Mauritania's surveillance and deterrence capabilities, both on land and at sea, and includes the provision of personal protective equipment, medical supplies, and a patrol vessel. This financial commitment builds on the recently established [migration partnership](#) signed between Mauritania and the EU in March, which outlined a cooperative framework to combat irregular migration. The agreement focuses on preventing the movement of migrants toward European shores, particularly Spain, and includes provisions for the repatriation of Mauritanian nationals who do not have regular residency in Europe. Nevertheless, this increased militarization of migration control has raised concerns.

Critics [argue](#) that the focus on interdiction and deterrence could lead to increased interceptions at sea, potentially [endangering](#) the lives of migrants and exposing them to human rights [violations](#). In the previous [quarter](#), an investigation by [Lighthouse](#) uncovered that migrants were routinely abandoned in desert regions of Mauritania. The report [revealed](#) that Spanish authorities were involved in supporting Mauritania's sea interceptions by providing funding for equipment and personnel training. Additionally, Spain supplied vehicles used for deporting migrants and took part in inspections of Mauritanian detention facilities.

Mauritania tightens immigration laws

In July 2024, a notice from the Ministry of Labour in Mauritania, reported by [Fragomen](#), announced the introduction of criminal penalties for employers who hire foreign nationals without valid work permits. In September 2024, the National Assembly in Mauritania adopted draft [law 24-029 on immigration penalties](#), which aims at addressing irregular migration while ensuring Mauritania's borders are controlled in alignment with national interests and international standards. The legislation provides a legal basis for expelling immigrants who violate immigration laws, particularly those who enter the country through unofficial points or whose presence "threatens security and public order." This development comes in a context of increased cooperation among the EU, Spain, and Mauritania in migration management.

⁷ Spain has also signed joint declarations with [Mauritania](#), [Senegal](#), and The [Gambia](#), outlining areas of cooperation in migration, security, economic development, and cultural exchange. The declarations also commit to strengthening bilateral relations and holding the first Spain-Mauritania High-Level Meeting in 2025.

Amid rising irregular migration from Mauritania to Spain and increasing arrivals of Malians seeking refuge in Mauritania, this legislation could affect mixed migration movements. Concerns were [raised](#) that the cooperation with the EU might blur the lines between irregular migration management and the protection of refugees. Stricter border controls measures, such as detentions and deportations, could [lead](#) to asylum seekers sent back to dangerous zones without having their claims properly reviewed.

Côte d'Ivoire and Morocco revise travel policies

On 14 August, Côte d'Ivoire announced the [reinstatement of visas](#) for citizens traveling to Morocco, sparking controversy. The decision, effective 1 September, reversed a longstanding free movement agreement, citing concerns about counterfeit passports and increasing irregular migration to Europe.⁸

The Ivorian government [justified](#) the policy change by citing a profiling process that revealed that out of 14,800 migrants arriving in Lampedusa as purported Ivorians, only a few dozen was confirmed as actual Ivorian nationals. Additionally, the government [alleged](#) the existence of organized networks involved in producing counterfeit passports and stamps. Critics, including Ivorians residing in Morocco, [argue](#) that the decision was too sudden, leaving individuals with insufficient time to adjust their plans. The Moroccan ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire, in an interview with [Fraternité Matin](#), stated that between 150 and 200 visas have been issued since the implementation of the new policy.

Return migration

UNHCR's Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM)

As of July 2024, [UNHCR](#) reports that 280 individuals who were evacuated from Libya through the Emergency Transit Mechanisms (ETMs) are still in Niger. This includes 49 individuals awaiting resettlement departures and 86 awaiting interviews or decisions from resettlement countries. Of these, 49 are set to depart for Canada and one for France, while the remaining 145 are awaiting processing by resettlement and refugee status determination units. Established in 2017, the [ETM Niger](#) evacuates refugees and asylum seekers in vulnerable situations from Libya to Niger. Upon arrival in Niger, they are registered and await resettlement to third countries.

Malians repatriated from North Africa amidst violence and instability

Despite ongoing violence and instability in Mali, many Malians are being repatriated from countries in the region, especially from North Africa.

⁸ Along the same lines, Morocco [tightened](#) visa rules in 2018 to curb irregular migration to Europe by requiring electronic visas from nationals of Mali, Guinea, and Congo-Brazzaville.

On 7 August, the Ministry of Malians Living Abroad and African Integration [welcomed](#) three groups of repatriated individuals in Bamako: 32 from Morocco, 129 from Libya, and 16 from Tunisia. Additionally, on 15 August, 150 Malian nationals were [repatriated](#) from Algeria. Between January and July 2024, approximately [5,684](#) Malians were repatriated. According to local sources cited by [Le Faso](#), 1,330 Malians were expected to be repatriated in August from Niger, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia.

These movements occur against the backdrop of increasingly securitized migration management in North Africa, ongoing instability in Mali, and a steady arrival of Malians in Mauritania. Notably, Mali has become the [leading country](#) of origin for irregular migration to Spain via the [Canary Islands](#) in 2024, with many departing from Mauritania. According to the UNHCR's Sahel coordinator, cited by [El Pais](#), 96% of Malian asylum applications in Spain are approved, underscoring the need for protection rather than stricter immigration controls. This situation underscores [concerns](#) that repatriations may affect the ability to seek [asylum](#), especially given that Mali remains at risk of worsening humanitarian conditions, as [noted](#) by the International Rescue Committee.

Burkinabè expulsions continue at Côte d'Ivoire borders

Expulsions of Burkinabè from Côte d'Ivoire have [continued](#) this quarter, as tensions at the border persist. According to [RFI](#), a group of Burkinabè nationals arrived in Côte d'Ivoire on 13 July, while some of them tried to register with local authorities, three days later, most of them were expelled back to Burkina Faso. The Burkinabè government condemned these actions as [violating humanitarian norms](#), while Ivorian authorities [maintain](#) that these were isolated incidents. These expulsions occur amid worsening security conditions in Burkina Faso. In August 2024, the [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data](#) (ACLED) reported an increase in violent activity in Burkina Faso, with the number of reported fatalities rising by 117% from July. Many Burkinabe continue to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, such as [Niger](#), [Mali](#), and [Benin](#).

Algeria-Niger diplomatic relationship slightly shifts, but expulsions persist

A [visit](#) to Algeria by Niger's Prime Minister and a larger delegation on 13-14 August, signalled a desire for enhanced [cooperation and new joint projects](#), though the migration topic was reportedly not discussed. This indicates a slight improvement in diplomatic relationships between Algeria and Niger, which had deteriorated last quarter when Niger [summoned](#) the Algerian ambassador to protest the "violent nature" of migrant expulsions from Algeria. Notwithstanding the recent warming of diplomatic ties, expulsions from Algeria continue.

Alarme Phone Sahara (APS) reported nearly [20,000](#) people were expelled from Algeria to Niger between early 2024 and August, condemning the violence reported by Algerian security forces. APS also documented new expulsions from [Libya to Niger](#), with 463 people expelled to Dirkou in northern Niger in July 2024. Local Libyan sources suggest this is the start of a broader expulsion campaign, with an estimated 10,000 people detained in Libya for deportation. In a context of continuing and increasing expulsions, APS has [called](#) for an end to mass deportations, arbitrary arrests, and police violence, and the establishment of safe routes for migrants across the Sahara and the Mediterranean.

Thematic Focus:

Navigating transition: the Confederation of the Sahel States and regional mobility

Introduction

On 6 July 2024, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso [formalized](#) the Confederation of the Sahel States (AES), following their January 2024 withdrawal from ECOWAS and the initial [announcement](#) of the Alliance in September 2023. The leaders emphasized an “[irrevocable](#)” break from ECOWAS, citing the need for sovereignty in response to perceived foreign interference in ECOWAS decisions. The subsequent loss of access to the ECOWAS’s 1979 Protocol on Free Movement of Persons (FMP)⁹ may introduce new barriers to mobility such as the introduction of visas and closed borders among AES and ECOWAS states, which could disrupt livelihoods and lives particularly for nationals who rely on cross-border trade and labour migration within the region.

The piece will explore how the formation of the Confederation of the Sahel States might reshape migration, cross-border trade, and what it means for people on the move in the region.

How mobility drives the region’s economy

Cross-border migration and trade are essential for the economies of the Sahel countries where intra-regional migration [represents](#) 84% of immigrants and 65% of emigrants.¹⁰ This reflects [deep historical and cultural patterns](#), with migrants from lower-income or landlocked countries (like [Mali](#), [Niger](#), and [Burkina Faso](#)) traditionally seeking work in coastal economies. Shutting down borders or adding new restrictions, therefore, could stifle [economic](#) activity and severely [impact](#) movements.

Recent mobility disruptions were observed following the July 2023 coup in Niger, which led to ECOWAS sanctions and subsequent [border closures](#). The closure of borders between Niger and Nigeria (between July and March 2023) had [left](#) trucks carrying goods stranded at border crossings and [contributed](#) to higher food prices, affecting [local markets and populations](#). The ongoing closure of borders between Benin and Niger has led to a similar situation, with trucks [stranded](#) at the borders,¹¹ affecting trade flows as well as the movement of people. Similar consequences could follow the AES’s break from ECOWAS.

9 Since 1979, a series of protocols formalized the right to free movement, allowing for residency and establishment rights, granting progressive rights to enter, reside, and establish businesses across the region. These protocols include the 1979 Protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment as well as Supplementary Protocol. The latter provides free mobility and visa-free entry for stays of up to 90 days

10 The [majority](#) of international migrants from AES countries traditionally migrate within West Africa, with over 97% of migrants from Burkina Faso living in another country in Western Africa, as do over 90% of migrants from Niger and over 75% of migrants from Mali.

11 The only official entry point between the two countries, the route connecting Benin to Niger via Malanville – Gaya was [disrupted](#).

Informality: a longstanding reality

Despite the existence of a framework for free movement under the FMP, intra-regional migration in West Africa has [predominantly been informal](#). Many people in the region [lack formal documents](#), such as IDs and travel documents, while states struggle to [register](#) populations, particularly in remote areas. Even when births are recorded, poor record-keeping make it difficult for individuals to [retrieve](#) a copy of their birth certificate years later. This further complicates the process of obtaining essential official documents, such as identification cards, which are necessary for accessing formal travel and migration. Unfamiliarity with legal mobility rights under the FMP also means that even when ECOWAS citizens are entitled to free movement, they are [unable to exercise](#) this right. Unequal access to resources, such as financial capital, impacts the types of journeys undertaken. While wealthier individuals can afford [expensive air travel](#),¹² others rely on land routes, where they are more likely to encounter [bribery and corruption](#).

The break with ECOWAS could drive more people toward informal migration pathways. As also observed during [Covid-19](#), the closure of borders in the region does not prevent mobility but may rather lead to more use of hidden routes with additional risks. Migrants [turn to smugglers](#) because they [facilitate](#) quicker movement through information, guidance to navigates routes, bribery or the provision of forged identity papers. For example, following the closure of borders between Niger and Benin [smuggling](#) operations using motorized pirogues have emerged on the Niger River, with over [500 people](#) crossing daily.

New risks for migrants

Research has [shown](#) that migrants in West Africa face abuse, extortion, and violence from local authorities, law enforcement, and non-state actors when crossing land borders. The establishment of the AES and the subsequent break from the FMP could further exacerbate existing [risks, as shown in the past in similar circumstances](#). For example, past restrictions like the Niger's 2015 anti-smuggling law forced migrants onto [more dangerous routes](#). As border closures and restrictions intensify, both migrants and smugglers seek out [alternative](#), often riskier, pathways. Although smugglers can act as [service providers](#), they can also be tied to [human rights violations](#).

This evolving context also adds greater uncertainty and vulnerability for AES citizens already living abroad. Nationals of the withdrawn states currently present in ECOWAS countries also [face](#) uncertain residency and employment rights. According to information collected by MMC, in Côte d'Ivoire, residency permits are increasingly checked at various checkpoints.

Are there any alternatives?

Although ECOWAS [may impose](#) visa restrictions on the AES, alternatives to the ECOWAS FMP exist. Continued membership in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), which has a [more](#)

¹² A study by the [African Airlines Association](#) (AFAA) shows that airports in Central and Western Africa impose the highest passenger taxes and fees on the continent, even surpassing those in Europe and the Middle East. While the average tax for international departures in Africa is USD 66, passengers in Europe and the Middle East pay much lower amounts, at USD 30,1 and USD 32,5 respectively, despite these regions handling higher traffic volumes.

[lenient](#) free movement zone, the potential for bilateral agreements, and the African Union's Free Movement of Persons framework could provide flexibility. The three countries also announced plans for a common biometric passport to harmonize travel documents,¹³ nevertheless their landlocked status presents challenges for larger regional mobility. Bilateral agreements with coastal countries could offer a viable alternative, both for migration and for trade.

Nevertheless, these alternatives face challenges. Reports of a potential new AES [currency](#) suggest a [possible](#) departure from WAEMU, although some view this as [unlikely](#) due to the countries' dependence on the union. Moreover, as of [3 October 2024](#), 33 countries have signed the AU Protocol, but only four, including Mali and Niger, have ratified it. Hence, the protocol remains largely underutilized. Furthermore, if awareness of the FMP is limited despite its wider recognition and ratification, it is likely that these lesser-known frameworks face even greater challenges in their implementation and effectiveness. Finally, negotiating and implementing regional or bilateral agreements require strong political will, resources, and implementation mechanisms.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Confederation of the Sahel States introduces new complexities for regional mobility. This transition takes place [amid](#) deteriorating political and socioeconomic conditions as well as [escalating](#) security [threats](#). Although the full impact on migration patterns remains unclear, it is likely that more people will turn to informal routes, rely on smugglers, therefore increasing their vulnerability. Monitoring how these changes unfold is crucial to understanding their broader implications for migrants and the region.

¹³ In early September, Burkina Faso [introduced a new passport system](#). The passport does not include any reference to or branding from ECOWAS.

Highlighted New Research and Reports



[The representation of sub-Saharan African migrants in the Tunisian written media: a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis](#)

The Journal of North African Studies | September 2024

The article examines how sub-Saharan African migrants are portrayed in Tunisian media. Using critical discourse analysis, the study found that the media largely depicts migrants negatively, casting them as security threats, economic burdens, and moral hazards. This negative portrayal, especially after the Tunisian president's February 2023 speech labelling migrants as part of a plan to change the country's demography, aligns with the government's rising nationalist and authoritarian rhetoric. The article raises concerns about how the media's alignment with political discourse might legitimize exclusionary policies, threatening both migrant protection and human rights. The research raises concerns regarding of the media's potential to incite violence and shape public opinion in transitional societies.



[Niger: The plight of deportees: impressions from the Agadez region from May to August 2024](#)

Alarme Phone Sahara (APS) | August 2024

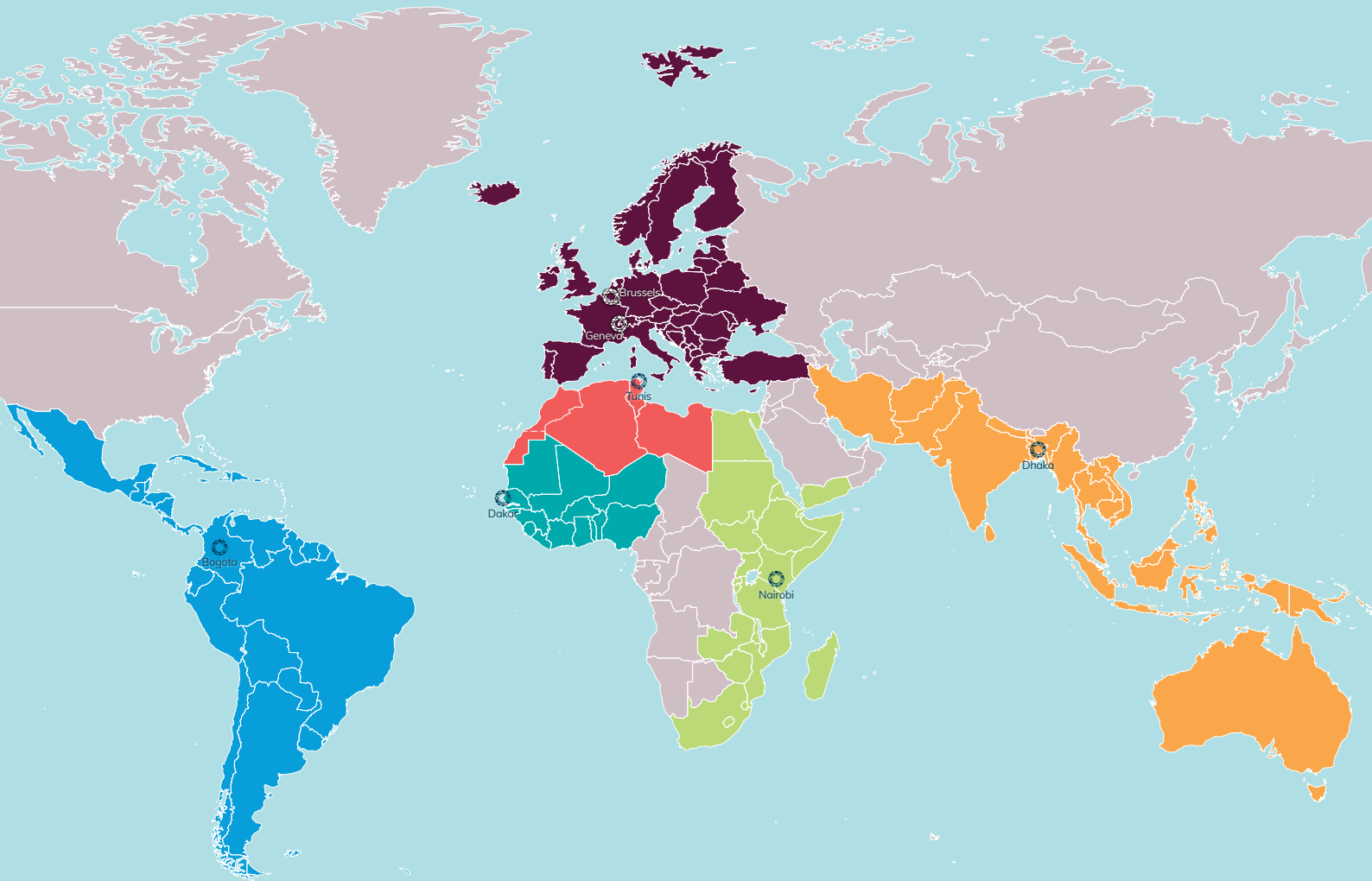
This article by Alarme Phone Sahara (APS) addresses the challenging conditions faced by migrants stranded in northern Niger, caught between borders. Following the repeal of the 2015-36 law in December 2023, migration flows into and out of Niger have become easier, leading to a sharp rise in deportations from neighboring countries such as Algeria and Libya. The article reports that over 20,000 individuals were expelled from Algeria back to Niger between January and August 2024. These migrants are often returned to "Point Zero," a remote area in the Nigerien desert, located 15 kilometers from the nearest village. The report explores the harsh living conditions of these deported migrants, who are dispersed across various locations including Arlit, Agadez, Dirkou, and Assamaka. The organization has gathered numerous testimonies from migrants highlighting their dire circumstances: many are stranded in northern cities, unable to access assistance, lacking necessities, and without adequate shelter or protection programs.

[Analysis of the factors behind internal climate migration in West Africa from 2020 to 2024 \(researchgate.net\)](#)



African Review of International Migration | July 2024

Published in the *African Review of International Migration*, this paper examines the interplay between internal and cross-border migrations in West Africa and climate change from 2020 to 2024. The authors highlight that West Africa is highly vulnerable to climate change due to its dependence on agriculture and pastoralism and its exposure to climate-related hazards. They estimate that climate change has displaced up to four million people in the region during the study period. The paper notes that ongoing demographic growth and urbanization will likely exacerbate the effects of internal migration caused by climate change, leading to significant regional challenges such as resource shortages, social tensions, and conflicts. To address these issues, the authors recommend that public policies in the region focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based mixed migration responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

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