
How did Agadez become a stopover on the migrants' route, or how to illustrate one of the undesirable side-effects of tougher border controls?

Agadez, a historic town from the great days of caravaneers, is still making a mark in its role as a strategic stopover between the South and the North. It has a dual appeal; firstly, its bus station allows migrants who arrive there with the money needed for the remainder of the trip to continue with few stopovers; secondly, it is a very hospitable town for those who need to rest or to try to earn money for the remainder of the trip. The existence of these two aspects and of well-structured migration networks has made Agadez a quintessential "transit" town. Migrants who are stuck or in transit find themselves selling motorbike spare parts or doing shoe repair, "mobile" clothes alteration, painting, brickwork, etc. As crossing the border becomes harder, more lucrative activities such as drug trafficking, pimping and prostitution are increasing.



Entry Portal to Agadez



Agadez, which has become a decentralised "urban district", now offers sufficient security to migrants offering services conducive to "transit": induction, accommodation and escorted travel. As soon as they arrive in the town, migrants are taken under the wing of migration professionals, namely "cokseurs" ["coaxers", i.e. touts] who find migrants, gain their trust and take them to a "Boss", an inn-keeper and tour operator rolled into one. This "Boss", the "Ghetto"² leader, often a hapless migrant who is settling down to take advantage of this "transit" opportunity, offers accommodation and a meal, organises a schedule and roadmap, and behaves like an all-knowing, all-powerful guardian. Once in the ghetto, migrants lose the right to speak out.

Over recent years, North Africa has been playing host to a growing number of sub-Saharan migrants "in transit", intent on reaching Europe. As the control of European borders is being more externalised and more stringent, "transit" migration is becoming *de facto* migration and shifting ever further South. With this increasing difficulty in reaching Europe, there is a certain amount of settling down by migrants, temporary to a lesser or greater degree, but sometimes for several years. This has led to the birth, or rebirth, of stopover towns such as Tamanrasset in southern Algeria, Nouadhibou in northern Mauritania, Oujda on Morocco's border with Algeria, and Gao and Agadez on the edge of the Sahara in Mali and Niger respectively.

Is it possible to outline a profile of migrants choosing the Niger corridor?

There are so many migrants in Agadez that the first question ought to be "How many are there?" before "Who are they?". It is a complex and dynamic phenomenon. One thing is sure, that these are people tired of their local everyday life, of "a future that never arrives", and driven by a strong conviction that the grass is greener elsewhere. They are mainly relatively young men and women, able to fund a long and expensive trip, ready to try anything to secure provisions over the course of the journey. Most undertake the trip with the blessing of the family circle which has usually collectively financed it. For the most part, they are relatively well-educated, many being educated up to the age of 18 or beyond and with only a minority being illiterate.

² The ghetto is where a group of people reside who share the same nationality, ethnicity or language, everything fostering a sense of security in the migrants. Consequently for example in Agadez, Nigerians, Ghanaians and Cameroonians are "handled" by long-established Nigerians. Guineans from Conakry and Bissau, Gambians, Senegalese and Ivorians are handled by a Senegalese. Burkinabés, Malians and Ivorians also share a ghetto.

Those attempting the journey to “*continue their studies*” mingle with those with professional qualifications who intend to “*be better remunerated*” and the simply adventurous. Underworld networks are growing too, those using migration to smuggle women to Libya and drug traffickers. The majority of “*educated*” migrants come from neighbouring countries (Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, Togo, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire) and Central Africa (Cameroon, Congo, DRC) whereas migrants from Mali and Niger are often illiterate. Nigeriens are a special case in the sense that they are rarely attracted by Europe. Their main destination is Libya and they are called “*wanderers*”. Nigeriens generally migrate for food reasons, looking to fill the “*slack*” between the last harvest and the next agricultural season.

It is very difficult to quantify the flow of migrants taking the Niger corridor towards the far North, Libya, Algeria or Europe. An annual figure of about 100,000 sub-Saharanans is usually suggested for the period since 2000. Routes via Libya to Italy and via Algeria and Morocco to Spain seem to have accounted for most of the traffic up to now. More effective and better-organised control systems in destination countries mean that more is known about the number of those stopped in North Africa and on the coast of Europe. According to data collected at Agadez station in August 2007 by an NGO which assists migrants in transit, Nigeriens constitute the majority of the migrant population leaving Agadez at 42%, followed by Nigerians (33.5%), Ghanaians (15.32%), Senegalese and Malians (4.6%). The least numerous are Burkinabés, Ivorians, Cameroonians and those from the Central African Republic. Figures from Niger’s DRPN (the national police regional directorate) indicate that 80% of migrants head for Libya and 20% for Algeria. Nonetheless, out of the 80% going to Libya, some, impossible to quantify, move on to Algeria to follow the Algerian and Moroccan routes into Europe. The figures are unreliable but those travelling on the official route show a difference between those entering and leaving, which indicates that the population of migrants “*in transit*” is significant.

Which routes are taken by migrants from Niger?

Since the 16th century, Agadez has acted as a crossroads for the movement of people and goods between the North and South of the African continent. Its geographical position, at the intersection of major caravan routes linking the Mediterranean to trading Hausa lands, is now used by migrants and migration networks. Tougher controls at Europe’s borders make clandestine migration routes longer and more difficult.

The main entry points are:

- The Nigeria-Niger border for those coming from Nigeria or Central African countries
- The Burkina Faso-Niger border for those coming from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Senegal and Guinea
- The Mali-Niger border for those coming from Mali via Yassane (Ayoru) in Northern Niger.



Niger has 10 official police stations to control these entry points, i.e. Makalondi (Niger/Burkina Faso), Gaya (Niger/Benin), Sabon Birni, Birnin Konni, Dan Issa, Dan Barto, Tinkin (Niger/Nigeria), N’Guigmi (Niger/Chad), Ayorou (Niger/Mali) and Assamakka (Niger/Algeria). Migration routes tend to converge on three key stopovers, i.e. **Agadez**, a meeting point for migrants pending departure to Algeria or Libya, **Dirkou**, a mandatory waypoint to or from Libya and an indirect gateway into Algeria, and **Arlit**, with one official waypoint and one clandestine route for entry into Algeria.

As regards the Agadez-Dirkou corridor, the routes are as follows:

- To the North-East/East (towards Libya): Agadez - Dirkou - Siguedine - Dao Timmi - Madama (border post) - Toummo - (Al Katrun - Sabah, in Libya).
- To the North-East/North-West (towards Algeria): Agadez-Dirkou-Siguedine-Chirfa-Djado-Djanet (Algeria).

As regards the Agadez-Arlit corridor, the routes are as follows:

- To the North-West/North (towards Algeria): Agadez - Arlit - Assamakka (border post) – (In Guezzam - Tamanrasset in Algeria). This is the official route, consequently the least difficult, but the least used.
- To the North-West/North-East (towards Algeria): Agadez - Arlit - Tchingalen - Adrar Bous - Tchibarakaten well - Djanet (Algeria). The latter route, formerly preferred by clandestine migrants, is no longer used since the outbreak of armed rebellion in the area.

With these four (4) “*official*” routes to the North, one towards Libya and three to Algeria, Agadez is located at a strategic stopover point between Southern and Northern Africa. The Agadez-Dirkou corridor heading towards the border with Libya has the heaviest traffic according to smugglers and transporters.

Based on your experience in the field, what do you see as Niger's forthcoming challenges in respect of West African migration?

Migration is currently more of a topic for debate in Europe than in Niger. 3% of West Africa's population is migrant and over 80% within the region (compared with 0.5% of the European population). West Africa has therefore a long tradition of mobility, voluntary or otherwise. Furthermore, in the few statistics we have, migrations lasting less than a year, or of a seasonal, trading or cross-border nature, are not counted. Niger complies with community development as governed by the regional treaties on free movement of people and goods (ECOWAS protocol). Niger's domestic legislation is different to the awkward and paradoxical situation found in Senegal, where according to its legislation, Senegalese migrants could be arrested and tried within Senegal itself for entering Europe, virtually and fictitiously. There is therefore no clampdown on migration. The country nevertheless finds itself confronting more than one negative trend brought about by tougher controls when leaving by the North and West African borders.

1. The first involves the increased number of migrants stuck or in transit in towns such as Dirkou, Arlit or Agadez. A lucrative trade is growing involving smuggling, and very visibly so, in Agadez, directly linked to the growth in the number of migrants and their settling while they save up the money needed for the remainder of the trip. It should also be known that it is standard practice to pay "entry fees" in stopover towns at police roadblocks and "visitor fees" to local councils.
2. The second trend involves the organisation of the migrant's route, now handled by a "ghetto". Migrants are no longer going it alone, but are forced to use a network. This situation has not yet deteriorated to the extent in Morocco where organised trade in migrants has supplanted routes that have always existed. It should not in fact be forgotten that where there is criminality, it is the smuggler and not the migrant committing the crime, in line with the UN Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants.
3. The third trend involves the human dimension to the phenomenon – migrants stuck in stopover towns because they have no more money or dare not return home out of shame; West African deportees from Libya or Algeria taken back to the Niger border irrespective of their nationality and finding themselves with no means of support, at best in Agadez and at worst in the desert. This last point raises a danger of undermining efforts towards community development and regional construction. Up to what point can Niger continue to play host to deportees from countries in the sub-region while observing the protocol on the free movement of people, crucial to West African balance?



>> **Contact:** Mr. Guy-Michel Bolouvi: mboluvi@yahoo.fr

Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD

Mailing Address: 2 rue André Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France
Visiting Address: Le Seine Saint-Germain, 4 bd des Iles, 92130 Issy-les-Moulineaux, France
Phone: +33 (0)1 45 24 89 87 - Fax: +33 (0)1 45 24 90 31
E-mail: swac.contact@oecd.org / www.westafricaclub.org

