



ICMPD

Migration Outlook 2022

West Africa

Five migration issues to look out for in 2022



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1. In 2022, West Africa will experience increased movement within the region resultant of the military coups d'état in Chad, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and the attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau. The economic recovery expected to occur after the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic could be impeded by tepid investments in countries that are considered unstable. Poor populations will become more vulnerable, thus seeking refuge and better livelihood in neighbouring countries. Cote d'Ivoire will likely see an increased number of refugees from Mali and Burkina Faso. Northern Ghana may receive a wave of migrants from Burkina Faso. Support from the international community will be required to strengthen host countries in dealing with the humanitarian crises.
2. Due to stricter border controls, regularly seen as an effect of the so called externalization of Europe's borders, and forced return of migrants from Northern Africa is causing a build-up of stranded migrants in Niger, this will continue in 2022. The effects might see a destabilization of host communities who are already dealing with limited resources and inadequate social services. Migrants will seek alternative routes to continue their journeys up north exposing themselves to vulnerable conditions and becoming victims of cross-border crimes. There is the need for governments and development actors to focus their attention on these developments, and to provide livelihood support to Nigerien host communities while they assist stranded migrants. Migrants in need of assistance should receive humanitarian assistance irrespective of whether or not they volunteer to return to their countries of origin.
3. The rebounding of the economies of countries in the region after the COVID-19 pandemic will open up opportunities for citizens to earn higher disposable income. The desire to emigrate is likely to increase across the region and dangerous new routes will probably be sought in order to reach North America, Europe and Asia. For 80% of all West Africans who decide to emigrate, their final destinations are countries within the region, taking advantage of the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol. The rate of remittances that slumped in 2020 will see a steady climb in 2022.
4. Return agreements between some West African countries and the European Union will continue to be a challenge due to lack of adequate understanding or consideration (on both sides) of what the other party's priorities are. The lack of sufficient consideration for the political and socio-economic factors inherent in the agreements themselves, particularly when you compare the rate of remittances to Foreign Direct Investments, and the waning tolerance for migration in the global political landscape can make these agreements a real pain point. Negotiation processes on return, readmission and reintegration might have to find new approaches and apply different styles to boost better results in 2022.
5. There will be more talks in 2022 on talent partnerships and creating more pathways for regular migration between West Africa and destination countries, as one of the means of discouraging irregular movements from sub-Saharan Africa. The question is whether these talks will see concrete steps taken and tangible results achieved to actualize the intentions.

Introduction

Migration in West African is mostly intra-regional with significant cross-border mobility, which is facilitated by the Free Movement Protocol signed by the member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)ⁱ. Intra-regional migration on the African continent is estimated at 52.6%, while it is 59% in Europe and 54.7% in Asia. However the intra-regional rate for sub-Saharan Africa is roughly 65%, and above 80% for West Africaⁱⁱ. The misconception is that West African migrants are moving in droves towards Europe when in fact, most migration is intra-regional. In 2021, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found nearly 90% of the 7.4 million migrants living in West Africa were from other countries in the region. Although European countries have become important destinations for West African Migrants in recent times.

Where are irregular migrants from West Africa headed in 2022? According to Frontex and the Spanish Ministry of Interior, the destination of irregular migrants from West Africa are progressively more through the West African Atlantic Routes. In 2021, 84 shipwrecks were identified along the migratory route with a conservative figure of 1,173 migrants dead.ⁱⁱⁱ Arrivals in Spain's Canary Islands in the third Quarter of 2021 comprised 4,905 West African refugees and migrants (UNHCR).^{iv} This trend will likely continue in 2022 with new economic activities developed in the Canary Islands and along the route to respond to the needs of migrants in their journeys.

Apart from migrants exploring new routes to get to Europe, Middle East and Asia, there is continued instability in the region caused by insurgents in the Sahel. Since 2020, there has been a wave of coups d'état (Guinea, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Mali) conflated with ongoing conflicts across West Africa, particularly in the Sahel belt. Internal displacements of people and the resultant effects on adjoining countries are expected in 2022. Internal displacements and cross border movements of people are expected to increase in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana, Benin and Niger from current figures (Figures 1&2). Though Niger is ostensibly more stable, it has also suffered militant attacks in the western part of the country and in March 2021, Niger quelled an attempted coup just before the swearing in of its newly elected president.

Figure 1: Top 10 Destination of Migrants in West Africa

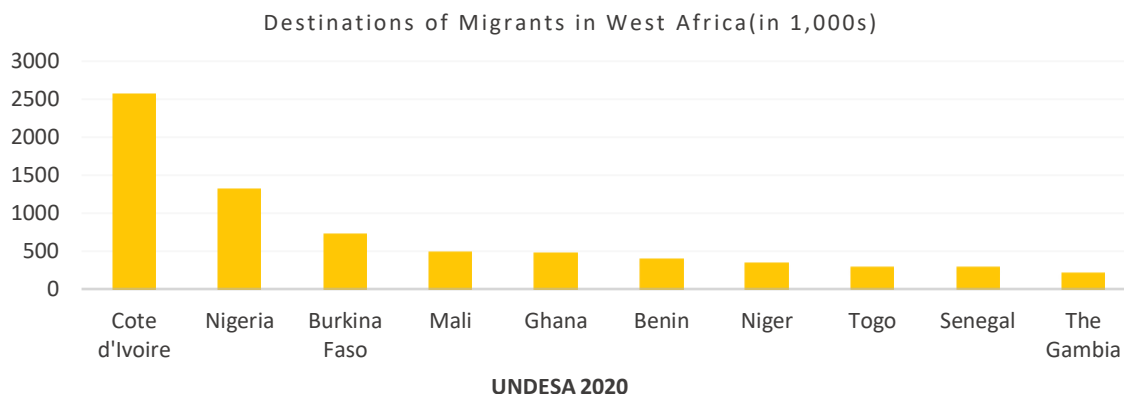
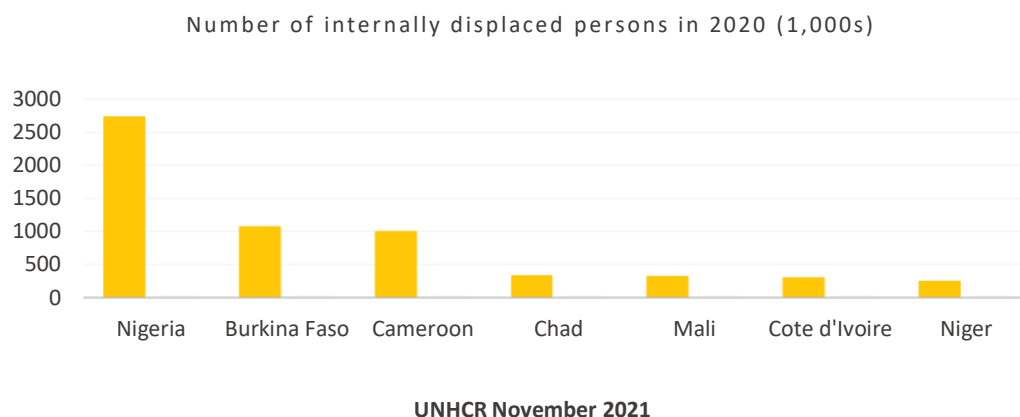
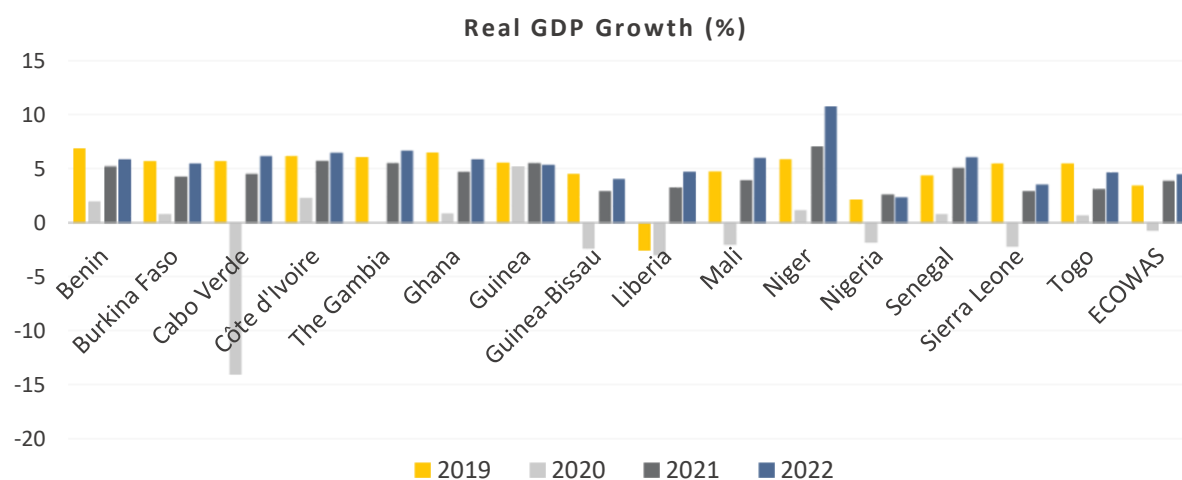


Figure 2: Internally Displaced Persons in 2020

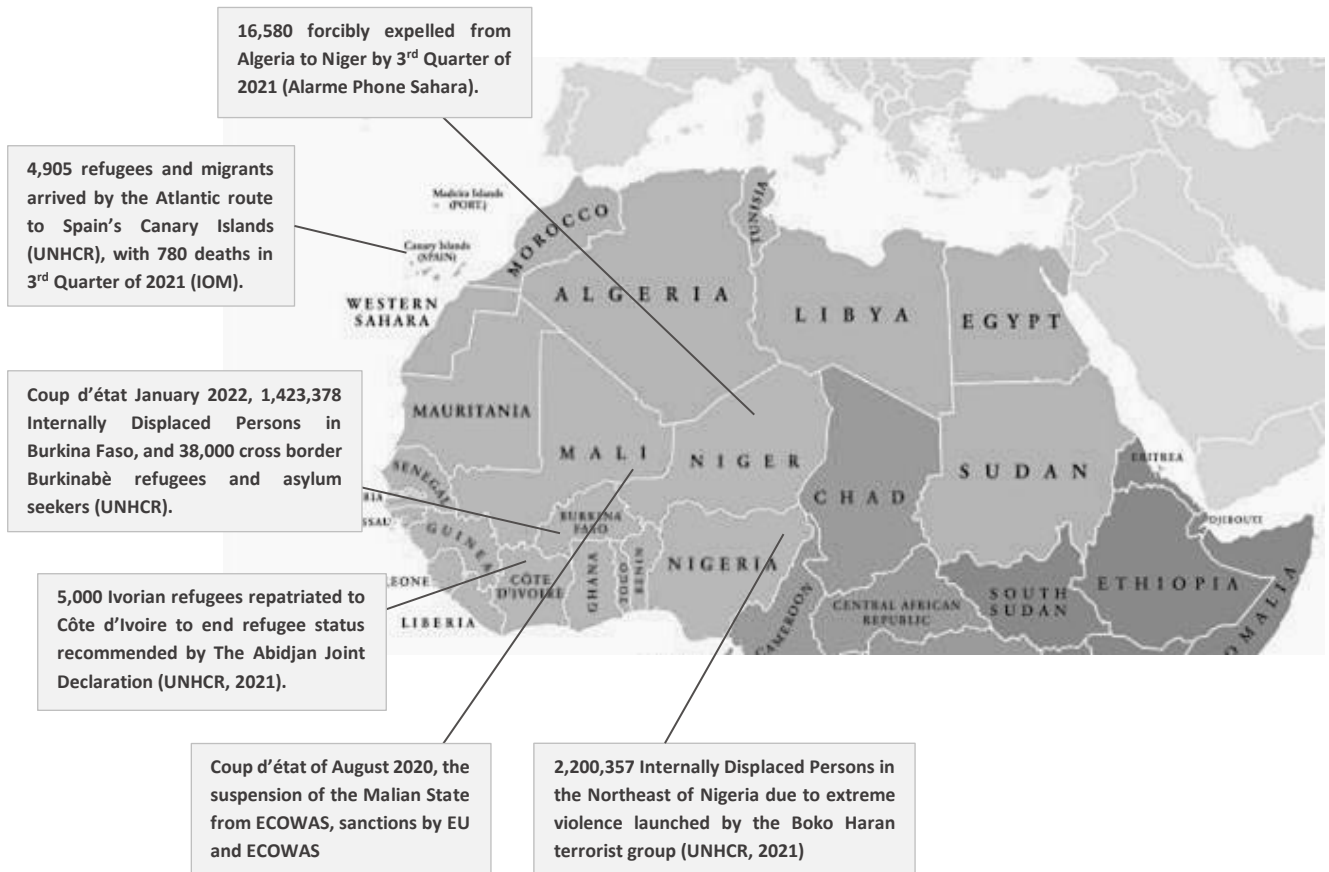


The year 2020 was unquestionably one of the most difficult for the West Africa region in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic had considerable impact on the economies of ECOWAS Member States; seven (7) countries out of fifteen (15) experienced negative growth in 2020, while others only had moderate increase in real GDP in the same year (Figure 3). Real GDP for the region was expected to grow at 3.9% in 2021 and 4.4% in 2022.^v These macroeconomic indices are important indicators of economic stability but also impact the potentials for migration in the region. Cabo Verde's real GDP shrank by 14% in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 on its tourism-based economy, while Niger is expected to grow at an impressive rate of 11% in 2022. Nigeria's economy is expected to rebound after the recession of 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent fall in oil prices. The Guinean economy continues to be resilient even when the forecasts at the beginning of the global pandemic was 1.4%, the real GDP grew 5.2% in 2020.

Figure 3: Real GDP of ECOWAS Member States 2019 – 2022



FOCUS COUNTRIES



MALI

The cumulative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the military coups d'état of August 2020 and May 25 2021, the suspension of the Malian State from the regional block - ECOWAS, the active threats posed by Islamic extremists, and the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS have caused an enormous shock to the Malian economy and the country's socio-political development. From an impressive growth rate of 5.1% in 2019 to a recession in 2020, the real GDP has shrunk by 2%.^{vi} The current security situation in the country is further aggravated by the planned departure of French troops, with imminent closure of their military bases across the country. The involvement of the Wagner Group, a Russian private military company (PMC), said to be contracted by the Malian military government to help fight the insurgents is drawing the interest of the United States. The major concern in Mali is the continued growth of militant groups and their expansion to neighboring countries. The real fear is that Mali could be the next safe haven for al-Qaeda and the Islamic State from where they could threaten the security of region through militancy and terrorism. Furthermore, migrants traveling northwards transit through Mali to reach Algeria or Libya with the ultimate goal of getting to Europe are at risk of being caught up

in conflict caused by the militants. The focus of international development organizations on security assistance to Mali and ECOWAS' emphasis on punishing the forceful takeover of government by the military might be missing the critical governance issue that is at the heart of the Malian crisis.

GHANA

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Ghana's economic growth. Real GDP growth was estimated to fall from the 2019 rate of 6.5% to 1.7% in 2020, due to the fall in crude oil prices.^{vii} Ghana is one of the most politically and economically stable countries in West Africa. It is a country of origin, transit and destination in terms of migration. In 2020, there were 476,412 migrants (1.5% of the local population), and 1,004,324 emigrants (UNDESA)^{viii}. The largest groups of migrants living in Ghana are Togolese, Nigerians and Ivoirians. While countries hosting a large number of Ghanaians are Nigeria, United States, United Kingdom, Cote d'Ivoire and Italy. In terms of inflow, in 2018 the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) registered 956,372 entries, and an outflow of 914,984 persons (including 296,720 of Ghanaian nationality). The data were collected at Kotoka International Airport; therefore, the figures certainly underestimate the real size of flows. In northern Ghana, the escalating crisis in the neighbouring Burkina Faso poses a double threat, first, the infiltration of terrorists, and second, possible spill over of displaced people across the border^{ix}. While the Sahelian conflicts show evidence of continuous escalation, the IDP population in Burkina Faso is increasing exponentially, exacerbating community tensions, scarcity of resources and consequent mobility towards coastal countries in search of livelihoods and security. Climate change induced violence between herdsman and farmers is increasing and this mobility appears to be unrecorded. Also in 2022, Ghanaian authorities will have to find the balance between securitisation of northern cross-border areas and assistance/protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

BURKINA FASO

Once considered one of the most stable countries in West Africa, Burkina Faso is going through turbulent times. As a landlocked country between Gulf of Guinea, the Sahel and North Africa, it is historically at the centre of trade and economic migration flows. It is also a country of immigration, with a limited presence of foreigners, mainly from West African countries^x. The migration stock in 2020 includes 723,989 migrants (3.5% of the local population), and 1,599,347 emigrants (UNDESA). The first destination for Burkinabé migrants is Cote d'Ivoire; the two countries represent destination and origin country for one another's migration flow.^{xi} Other countries of destination in West Africa are Ghana, Mali, Niger and Togo^{xii}, while destination countries outside of Africa are Italy, France, Spain and Germany. According to UNHCR, as of July 2021, the total number of asylum-seekers fleeing Burkina Faso were 38,000, including 11,400 in Niger and 20,000 in Mali, with 1.2 million internally displaced people as of March 2021. The number of IDPs increased from 87,000 in January 2019 to over 1.2 million persons in two years. For UNHCR it is the world's fastest growing displacement crisis^{xiii}. The dynamics at play in Burkina Faso in migration related issues, socio-economic development and security will probably continue to be at the centre of public policies and international aid in the upcoming years. Further efforts will be necessary to the securitisation of border areas, with support to national agencies in terms of training, logistics, equipment and cooperation with neighbouring countries. Involvement of local communities, investment in development of decentralised social services and enhancement of

protection of vulnerable people (refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs and victims of trafficking) will need to continue in parallel with the security efforts in Burkina Faso. An increase in diaspora investment could be key to the reprieve needed to address the difficult economic situation of individual Burkinabe families to build resilience.

NIGERIA

Nigeria's economy went into recession in 2020, due to the fall in crude oil prices caused by a decline in global demand, because of the effects of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The real GDP shrank by 3% in 2020 while the economy is expected to grow by 1.5% in 2021 and 2.9% in 2022.^{xiv} Nigeria is an important source of migration. UN DESA estimates that 1.7 million Nigerians live abroad permanently, in other African countries but also in the U.S. and Europe. Thus, Nigeria is also regarded as a country of origin for irregular migration and human trafficking. On the other side is the volume of diaspora remittances (\$17.2 Billion in 2020) sent through formal channels which rivals Foreign Direct Investments and Overseas Development Assistance. It is estimated that diaspora remittances are much higher if unrecorded amounts sent through informal means is taken into account. According to UN DESA, Nigeria registered 1.3 million immigrants in 2020 representing 0.6% of its population. This proportion is less than the global average (3.6%) and the average for the West Africa region (1.9%). Migrants from Benin made up about 30% of all those counted, while others are mostly from ECOWAS countries (Ghana, Mali, Togo and Niger). Although COVID-19 restrictions may have resulted in the reduction of international migration flows, internal population displacement will remain a challenge for Nigeria as the threat of insecurity continues to spread across different parts of the country. Nigeria has finally designated the armed bandit group operating in the northwest of the country as a terrorist organization.^{xv} This will allow the government to address the problem with the seriousness needed and to deploy the resources required.

COTE D'IVOIRE

In 2020, the real GDP in Côte d'Ivoire grew 1.8%, a decline from the 6.4% growth of 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many sectors of the Ivorian economy. A slump in global demand affected Côte d'Ivoire's export sectors including agriculture, mining, petroleum products, and transport. Ivory Coast is strategically located between Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea and Liberia and serves as a destination country for many migrants from the West Africa sub-region. It currently hosts circa 2.5 million immigrants, which translates to 9.7% of the country's population, with about 60% coming from Burkina Faso. (UNDESA, 2020). The decade after the 2010-11 crisis, saw an increasing number of Ivoirians taking the central Mediterranean route to Europe. According to IOM, about 25,000 Ivoirians arrived in Europe through this route between 2016 and 2020, putting them at third place after Nigerians and Guineans. Furthermore, Cote d'Ivoire featured in the top five countries with the most arrivals in Spain and Italy, in 2020. Ironically, Cote d'Ivoire also emerged as the country that hosted the most migrants from the West African region in 2020 (UNDESA). The activities of violent extremists in Burkina Faso is putting pressure on Ivorian borders, due to Burkinabe's fleeing their homes to find refuge in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire. This is despite land and sea borders remaining closed, which means that the Burkinabe's entering Cote d'Ivoire do so irregularly and are therefore undocumented, making it difficult for authorities to keep track of newcomers (MMC, 2021). If the land borders remain

closed in 2022, this trend of clandestine crossing will likely continue. There is no dedicated migration policy for Cote d'Ivoire in place yet; instead, migration is managed through several legal instruments domiciled with different government agencies and ministries. At the international level, Cote d'Ivoire has signed and ratified several conventions, ranging from anti-trafficking in human beings, child protection, labour migration, refugees and stateless persons. In addition, Cote d'Ivoire concluded an informal arrangement with the EU on returns and readmission in 2019 (MPI, 2019). The implementation of these agreements and conventions is a demanding task that will require both the government's attention and considerable resources in 2022.

NIGER

In 2020, Niger's economy slowed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic where real GDP grew only 1.2% after growing 5.9% in 2019 and 7% in 2018. If the global pandemic is brought under control, the world economy will strengthen, and Niger's real GDP could grow 6.9% in 2021 and 7.8% in 2022.^{xvi} Niger is a state with complex migratory dynamics. In terms of emigration, the IOM records show 402,000 Nigeriens living outside their country in 2020 and 294,000 migrants living in the country, or 1.3% of its population. Niger is mainly a transit country for migrants wishing to reach North African states such as Libya and Algeria or Europe. From the 1990s, the city of Agadez, at the gates of the Sahara, became a pivot for migration, making the passage of migrants the main economic activity of the city. The phenomenon of circular migration between Niger and other countries is frequent (Yuen, 2020) particularly Algeria and Libya. According to IOM, the main destinations for Nigeriens are neighbouring countries (37.8% in Nigeria, 12.6% in Libya, 8.3% in Benin and 12.4% Côte d'Ivoire). However, emigration to Algeria and Libya is becoming increasingly difficult for Nigeriens. In 2015, faced with an increase in the arrival of migrants, Niger aligned itself as a strategic partner to the European Union, due to its key role as a transit country. In May 2015, under pressure from the EU and because of the uproar caused by the death of 92 migrants, Niger enacted a new law (2015-36) to prevent and fight against smuggling of migrants.^{xvii} The implementation of the new law led to repressive measures such as the establishment of roadblocks at inland points in Niger in order to block access to Agadez, thus making it possible to partly reduce migration within the national territory. Though in 2016, 445,000 migrants crossed the border between Niger and Libya or Niger and Algeria, that number saw a decrease of 62% in 2017. Various studies reveal that these repressive measures have contributed to the abandonment of some of the migratory routes, thus increasing the vulnerability of migrants who are forced to take more dangerous routes in the desert in order to avoid detection. Finally, the new legal framework, in practice, goes against the principle of free movement of ECOWAS, rolling back some of the fundamental freedoms of ECOWAS citizens. Nigerien authorities justify the tough measures taken by pointing to the link between migration and trafficking of arms and drugs.

Important Migration trends in the region

REMITTANCES

Western African countries received \$27 billion in remittances in 2020. The World Bank and IMF reported a drop of 27.7% in remittances to Nigeria from \$23.24 billion in 2019 to \$17.2 billion in 2020.^{xviii} Nigeria is the largest recipient in sub-Saharan Africa in absolute terms, nearly 64 percent of the total received for the region, while the Gambia (15.6%) and Cabo Verde (13.9%) received the most remittances as a share of GDP. Though estimates for 2020 show that remittances to the region dropped by 19.3 percent due to COVID-19, remittances to five of the 15 countries for which data are available increased. Remittances received in Nigeria fell by 27.7% in 2020 whereas remittances received in Gambia increased by 5 per cent (World Bank, 2021).

Migrant remittance inflows (US\$ million)	2018	2019	2020e	Remittances as a share of GDP in 2020e (%)
Benin	199	217	206	1.4%
Burkina Faso	456	467	465	2.8%
Cabo Verde	233	236	244	13.9%
Cote d'Ivoire	332	328	324	0.5%
Gambia, The	204	275	298	15.6%
Ghana	3,521	3,396	3,565	5.2%
Guinea	28	158	151	1.0%
Guinea-Bissau	128	151	123	8.6%
Liberia	460	346	333	11.0%
Mali	1,022	1,022	987	5.6%
Mauritania	60	64	61	0.7%
Niger	297	309	300	2.2%
Nigeria	24,311	23,809	17,208	4.0%
Senegal	2,428	2,522	2,562	10.5%
Sierra Leone	62	53	59	1.4%
Togo	451	458	441	5.9%
ECOWAS	34,191	33,814	27,326	

Data Source: IMF^{xix}

Somewhat unexpectedly, the disruptions in mobility and global economy growth due to the COVID-19 pandemic did not lead to a significant decrease in global migrant remittances. Related flows proved to be remarkably resilient. By the end of 2020 they were only 1.6% below 2019 levels (540 billion USD instead of 548 billion USD). The pandemic, however, has increased economic pressures on large parts of the overall population in countries of the global south but also on the migrant and refugee populations residing within their territories. The observed resilience of migrant remittances might cushion some of these pressures but surely not all of them. A further rebound of the world's economy

in 2022 will not lead to a reduction in the inequality gap in GDP and in household income among the world regions; both are expected to rather widen. Related imbalances will affect Western African countries as well and might increase the potentials for migration within and from the region.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Sub-Saharan Africa faces a faster rate of natural disasters than the rest of the world. From droughts and floods to cyclones and pandemics, the continent faces many natural factors of instability. The World Bank predicts 86 million climate change migrants in Africa by 2050 (World Bank, 2021). Some of the eighteen million seasonal migrant workers could see their jobs in agriculture; mining and fishing disappear, increasing the prospects for permanent migration in search of new employment opportunities. Thirty percent of West and Central Africans and Ethiopians reported environmental impacts on their economic conditions. Border closures linked to COVID-19 have resulted in tens of thousands of migrants across Africa being stranded. Climate change is affecting the age-old practice of cross-border transhumance in West Africa, and particularly in the Sahel. As an economic activity driving regional development, transhumance has undergone major shifts over the past few decades. Climatic variability, demographic pressure, increasing competition for scarcer resources, political volatility and insecurity have profoundly affected transhumance routes and flows.^{xx} Climate change is a structural driver which both increases long-term migration potentials and triggers short-term migration events. It is quite likely that both factors will impact migration in West Africa in 2022 and beyond.

CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

Meanwhile, the Sahel has developed into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises and to one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world. The situation deteriorated further in 2021. Although much of the conflict is centred along the borders between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, it has already had a significant impact on neighbouring countries such as Chad, with the possibility that it could spread towards the coast, affecting Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. Nigeria's North and Northwest Zones are afflicted by a multidimensional crisis rooted in long-standing tensions between ethnic and religious groups. Criminal activities and kidnapping have recently pushed some 10,000 Nigerians to Niger. In the south, independence movements in Biafra are increasingly active and criminality has increased throughout the country, creating further push factors on a rapidly growing population. As in previous years, most of the displacement will occur within Africa and only a small share of African migrants and refugees will attempt to reach Europe. However, the Africa-wide increase in displacement and the worsening situation in major conflict zones do not suggest that related figures will go down in 2022. As regards West Africa, much will depend on the development of the Sahel crisis but also on the political situation in Libya as a main point of departure for movements of refugees and irregular migrants from the regions towards Europe.

CONCLUSION

In West Africa, actions have been undertaken in the area of migration management at regional and national levels. At the regional level, ECOWAS has adopted a series of legal instruments aimed at achieving its objective of free movement within the region. However, given that these protocols are not legally binding, their application by the fifteen member States is only partial. Although aware of the issues related to the regulation of migratory flows, the States of the region do not generally consider migration as a political priority. In case they do, their emphasis is often on the question how to promote diaspora remittances for the benefit of their economies. Measures aimed at restricting migratory flows have nevertheless been implemented by ECOWAS countries. This, however, also implied that often migrants take new, sometimes more dangerous migration routes to countries with less restrictive legislation on admission and residence. Thus, since 2019, the departures of migrants from Senegal to the Canary Islands have been on the rise; in 2020, nearly 18,000 West African migrants arrived in the Canary Islands, seven times more than in 2019. Countries of origin would have to develop a safety strategy vis-a-vis their citizens and play a leading role in ensuring that their nationals receive necessary information on the dangers of traveling irregularly.

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ⁱⁱ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/africa/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_345393.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ IOM DTM and the Spanish Ministry of Interior: <https://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivalsandhttp://www.interior.gob.es/prensa/balances-e-informes/2021>. December 2021

^{iv} UNHCR Spain data portal & Ministry of Interior, Spain Weekly Snapshot - Week 39 (27 Sep - 3 Oct 2021)

^v ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development, 2021.

^{vi} AfDB African Economic Outlook (2021) From Debt Resolution to Growth: The Road Ahead for Africa

^{vii} *ibid*

^{viii} UNDESA, International Migrant Stock 2020: Destination / International Migrant Stock 2020: Origin.

^{ix} Mixed Migration Centre (2021) “The impact of the Sahel conflict on cross-border movements from Burkina Faso and Mali towards Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana”.

^x “Burkina Faso Country profile”, Maastricht School of Governance, 2017, and “The impact of the Sahel conflict on cross-border movements from Burkina Faso and Mali towards Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana”, *cit.*

^{xi} The migration corridor Burkina Faso-Cote d’Ivoire, in 2020, registered a flow from Burkina Faso of more than 1.3 million people, and from Cote d’Ivoire to Burkina Faso more than 500.000 people. Source: Migration data portal / Migration data in Western Africa ([link](#)).

^{xii} European Union Global Diaspora Facility, [Link](#).

^{xiii} “UNHCR position on returns to Burkina Faso”, July 2021.

^{xiv} African Economic Outlook (2021) From Debt Resolution to Growth: The Road Ahead for Africa

^{xv} The instrument of proscription was gazetted on 06 Jan 2022 less than 24 hours after the ravaging bandit group reportedly killed over 158 resident in Zamfara state

^{xvi} African Economic Outlook (2021) From Debt Resolution to Growth: The Road Ahead for Africa

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^{xx} Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre - Suivi des mouvements de transhumance - Cartographie des transhumants bloqués le long du couloir central de transhumance (Janvier 2021)