

# Youth of Niger: migration as a double-edged sword for labour inclusion

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### PITCH

Migration is a major livelihood strategy for young men in Niger, with the potential to aid household escapes from poverty. However, there are obstacles to achieving sustained poverty escapes that need to be accounted for in tailoring policies in favour of youth.

### MOTIVATION & CONTEXT

Migration is an important livelihood activity in Niger, traditionally internal or with Nigeria and other neighbours. More recently these neighbours have acted as transit countries for Nigeriens migrating north to Algeria, Libya and Europe.

While an ECOWAS 90-day visa waiver allows freedom of movement in the 15 ECOWAS countries, migration from Niger northwards is more problematic: migration routes have been disrupted by joint efforts in destination countries and via the implementation of the 2015-36 law criminalizing irregular migration. Several informal and more risky bypass routes have emerged in response, as well as a growing rate of repatriations from North Africa.

In this context, the associated article<sup>1</sup> inspects how international and internal migration affects the integration

of young people into the world of work in ways conducive to poverty escapes.

### METHODS

A multidisciplinary and mixed-methods approach<sup>2</sup> identifies how young people in Niger experience chronic poverty, sustained poverty escapes, or (re)impoverishment. A qualitative dataset collected in Tahoua and Zinder regions and national quantitative data consider how multiple drivers of poverty escapes or descents affect youth inclusion in labour markets, in this brief through migration.

### RESULTS

For young males who can afford initial migration costs, migration occurs for seasonal or longer spells. Country-wide, youth migrate internationally more than internally. Seasonal internal labour migration is a coping strategy in Tahoua and Zinder, particularly from agricultural areas to Niamey. Migration is seen as occupational up-grading for non-poor young men. Manual and physical labour in seasonal jobs is a means of smoothing income and consumption needs of the migrant's household, eventually building up some savings in the hope that capital accumulation leads to a

transition into trade opportunities. Those who migrate into a trade or sales job have a better remunerated activity that may contribute to larger savings. It is precarious and risky, but if successful makes a critical contribution to enable investment in small businesses at home, together with informal training and skills acquisition through the migration journey. Many youth who are able to migrate internationally report travelling to Algeria, Libya, Nigeria and Ivory Coast. They experience a range of employment and skills opportunities. If well learnt, these skills and savings can be beneficial to invest in businesses once back home.

Young women may take on greater income generating efforts partly to complement migrant husbands or to repay migration costs. To do this they challenge and negotiate social norms, otherwise facing barriers to improving wellbeing.<sup>3</sup> Their migration rate is much lower from Tahoua and Zinder (excluding Kantché area), and they tend to have small internal migration spells or join their husbands in the country of destination. Most young women in these situations do not exercise an income-generating activity abroad, instead practicing savings strategies for remitting back to the village.

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**Key words** Migration, Labour inclusion, Poverty escapes

**Geography** Niger

**Themes** Employment, Youth, Migration

**Find out more about this project:** <https://www.afd.fr/en/carte-des-projets/youth-inclusion-labour-markets-niger-evidence-tahoua-and-zinder>

Better-off returning migrants often change their main off-farm employment activity, moving from low paid-physical labour to trade and business. They may engage in the transport sector (taxi, garages), import-export trade using migration-based networks, or work in technology repair (mobiles, computers, printing services). There is thus a window of opportunity for some. The network of support for returning migrants could be better developed to support youth labour trajectories.

Constraints on success are multiple:

(i) There are many who cannot find the means to migrate: only half of youth in chronic poverty can undertake migration; others are

unable to cover transport costs from household funds or social networks.

(ii) Migration can also be a factor in achieving only a temporary escape from poverty: the likelihood of failure is higher for migrant youth with limited capital and skills prior to starting their journey and with high indebtedness due to informal loans to finance its costs. Chronically poor youth of secondary-school age may engage in short agricultural migration jobs, with direct implications for the level of education completed and indirectly for their job and wellbeing prospects.<sup>4</sup>

(iii) When unexpected needs or large demands arise back home, young migrants may be unable to save. Indebtedness to repaying

lucrative loans could also lead to poverty.

(iv) Migration hazards are significant and multiple. Many migrants report experiences of discrimination and bad treatment during the journey as well as at work in destination countries. When migration does not go well, there are high risks in making the return journey, for which some end up relying on deportation or voluntary repatriation programs. Within ECOWAS there is an active Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA) which is in a position to address the risks migrants face, but fast-changing migration routes require additional local level engagement in high-migration areas and at the borders to better protect migrants.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Strengthen business development support to returning migrants including women, to maximise use of their savings. Accompany local development support with national frameworks, like the National Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Youth Entrepreneurship, including tools for returning migrants.
- ▶ Provide access to savings and capital for young men and women in chronic poverty, who otherwise may risk high indebtedness due to migration. The support of social networks (e.g. Fada) and NGOs is needed to lead this on the ground. Beyond funds, government could provide an institutional and legal framework to ensure fair access for the poorest youth.
- ▶ Support young women who are challenging social norms to provide for their family by identifying their needs and best approaches to support ongoing gender and generational norm changes to reduce conflict within the family or community.
- ▶ Expand social protection of people in poverty to create a level playing field for work and mobility:
  - Intensify the move from *ad-hoc* subsidies and emergency safety nets during food security crises towards a more extensive national cash transfer programme, to expand in emergencies and target vulnerable young women and men.
  - Explore the feasibility of moving beyond cash-for-work programmes to a legally-based employment guarantee scheme to systematically provide seasonal employment at times of high seasonal unemployment, and a wage floor to enable the poorest young women and men to participate in the labour market on better terms.
- ▶ Foster secondary city development beyond Niamey to help diversify migrant destinations. Measures would include: recognising and supporting the informal economy with business development services; avoiding the enforcement of regulations that harm microenterprises and instead providing them with adequate compensation when necessary; and investing in main services for slums and settlements.

<sup>1</sup> da Corta, L., Diarra, A., Diwakar, V., Eichsteller, M., Harouna, A., and Poggi, C. (2021). Youth inclusion in labour markets in Niger: Gender dynamics and livelihoods, AFD Research Paper n.216.

<sup>2</sup> Diarra, A., da Corta, L., Diwakar, V. and Harouna, A. (2021). Mixed methods approach for research: combining the LASDEL ethnographic methodology with CPAN's critical realist poverty dynamics methodology to explore youth employment inclusion in Niger, AFD Research Paper n.217.

<sup>3</sup> Shepherd, A., Harouna, A., Poggi, C., Diwakar, V., Diarra, A., and da Corta, L. (2021). Youth of Niger: entrepreneurship between struggle and norms renegotiation. AFD Policy Dialogues n.51.

<sup>4</sup> Shepherd, A., Harouna, A., Poggi, C., Diwakar, V., Diarra, A., and da Corta, L. (2021). Youth of Niger: schooling and training as useful tools for inclusion. AFD Policy Dialogues n.52.