



Accessing the most vulnerable people in Agadez and Ouagadougou

Executive Summary

8 April 2020

Part of the **SSS II** programme





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What is IMREF?

This report was written by IMREF. IMREF is the Independent Monitoring, Rapid Research and Evidence Facility of the SSS Phase II programme commissioned by the Department for International Development (DFID). It is delivered by a consortium led by Integrity Global, which includes Seefar, IMPACT Initiatives, and the Danube University Krems.

IMREF aims to provide programme stakeholders with a better understanding of results, to improve accountability through monitoring and verification activities, and to identifying gaps and areas where partners could strengthen delivery. IMREF will also facilitate adaptation and learning in SSS II by delivering and using evidence from research to inform programmatic and potentially policy decisions to that support vulnerable people in mixed migration flows.

Safety, Support and Solutions Phase II (SSS II)

DFID's Safety, Support and Solutions Phase II (SSS II) programme is a migration programme which aims to make migration safer and provide critical humanitarian support, resulting in fewer deaths and less suffering along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR).



SSS II is implemented by IOM, UNICEF, British Red Cross, and a consortium led by the Danish Refugee Council. SSS II takes a route-based approach when responding to the complex needs of mixed migrant populations including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and victims of trafficking, in a wide range of countries along the CMR.



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People in mixed migration journeys from West and East Africa towards Libya, Algeria and Tunisia, and ultimately Italy, transit along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR). On the CMR, they are vulnerable to harm, including violence, physical abuse and exploitation.

Providing direct assistance to these transit migrants comes with specific challenges that differ from other humanitarian displacement contexts. In particular, organisations report that they need a more nuanced understanding on who the most vulnerable transit migrants are in mixed migration contexts along the CMR, who should be targeted for assistance among transit migrants as a result, and how to access transit migrants in the context of armed conflict segments of the route.

To fill these gaps, this study looks at vulnerabilities among migrants in two key transit hubs – Ouagadougou and Agadez – and analyses how humanitarian actors target and seek to access vulnerable migrants in those two locations. To do so, it draws from:

- A desk review of 68 reports, academic articles and programme documents from Implementing Partners of the Safety, Support and Solutions Phase II (SSS II) programme and other relevant partners;
- Interviews with 30 local stakeholders (including bus station workers, smugglers, local government representatives, local community leaders, and police officers);
- Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with 37 humanitarian and development service providers;
- Structured focus group discussions (FGDs) and case studies with a total of 136 transit migrants (including 33 women and 10 children).

The study provides insight into the vulnerabilities of the qualitative sample, how they evolved, and how to address them. However, the methodology of the study is purely qualitative and does not engage a representative sample of all vulnerable migrants in Ouagadougou and Agadez.

Vulnerabilities in Ouagadougou and Agadez

- **Among the study's participants, vulnerability increase the longer migrants journey along the CMR.** As migrants are increasingly exposed to different forms of extortion and abuse, their financial resources diminish and their physical and mental stresses increase. At later stages of the journey, migrants also become increasingly dependent on smugglers for transportation – when they are most frequently subjected to physical abuse, torture and sexual assault. This implies that migrants who spend more time en route, including those who are stranded or expelled from Algeria or Libya, are generally among the most vulnerable. While all migrants experience situational vulnerability, these often amplify the vulnerabilities of women, children, and migrants with disabilities or chronic illnesses.
- **As a result, migrants' levels of vulnerability appear to generally be lower in Ouagadougou than Agadez.** In Agadez, transit migrants have no alternative but to rely on smugglers for transportation. In response to the European Union's (EU) attempts to manage migration flows, smugglers in Agadez increasingly use less frequented and more dangerous routes to avoid detection by authorities. Moreover, migrants who have been expelled from Libya or Algeria and have gone back to Agadez or Ouagadougou to resume their journey, and have then become stranded, are particularly vulnerable as they have often been exposed to serious instances of harm. The study confirms, however, that there are still many vulnerable migrants in need of assistance in Ouagadougou.

Targeting vulnerable migrants

- **Given challenges in reaching highly mobile migrants, organisations have taken different approaches to targeting the most vulnerable migrants.** They either use a broad understanding of vulnerability or adopt a more focused approach targeting specific groups. The former approach refers to a wide range of vulnerability criteria and sees transit migrants as vulnerable by nature given the harm they are exposed to during the journey. The latter approach targets specific groups which are particularly vulnerable, such as unaccompanied minors and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) survivors in transit or vulnerable children travelling internally or regionally. Few organisations were

actively using tools that help monitor vulnerabilities in given transit hubs to revisit targeting strategies and criteria.

- **Community mobilisers, volunteers and local authorities report that they struggle to clearly spot all vulnerabilities as some are actively hidden by migrants or not visible at a first look.** This includes survivors of SGBV, LGBTQI-identifying individuals, and underaged youth.
- **There are gaps in ensuring effective targeting through referrals.** Informants described referrals as an effective way to target vulnerable migrants, but findings suggest mechanisms have some gaps. However, field workers say they are not fully familiar with the mandates and support provided by all organisations which are part of the referral mechanism; that phone numbers indicated for referral do not always work; and that some organisations deal with all referrals due to lack of funds.
- **Successful targeting is closely tied to access strategies and the ability to identify migrants in places they transit and live,** either to access them directly or to find ways that ensure migrants receive information on the services available to them.

Accessing vulnerable migrants

- **Organisations noted they had been increasingly successful at accessing migrants by building networks with key focal points.** To improve access to highly mobile migrants, organisations have built networks in different migration hubs; notably by sending volunteers and community mobilisers to main migration intersections in Ouagadougou and Agadez (particularly bus stations). Organisations also work with local migrant associations and engage with smugglers to access migrants in clandestine networks. However, a lack of coordination among organisations in migration intersections within Ouagadougou and Agadez and inconsistent engagement with migrant associations appeared to limit the extent to which this strategy is working effectively.
- **Significant access barriers remain for humanitarian actors to access migrants, and migrants to access services.** These barriers limit access to certain vulnerable migrants, including transit migrants in smuggling networks, female migrants in brothels and migrants in jail.
- **There is mixed feedback regarding the availability of accurate information about support services for migrants along the route.** Migrants who have less information about support services are those at earlier stages of the route and those who travel alone. Even when migrants are aware of the presence of aid organisations, some are unsure what services are available to them, if they are eligible; and how to approach organisations in case of need.
- **The lack of trust in humanitarian actors severely limits transit migrants' uptake of available services on the CMR.** Migrants may not be willing to access services provided by humanitarian organisations due to perceptions that they will be forced or encouraged to return to their country of origin, despite suffering from financial losses, physical and mental health-related vulnerabilities. This raises questions around organisations' ability to reach migrants travelling to North Africa and Europe.
- **It is unclear which strategies are most effective at incentivising smugglers to refer vulnerable migrants to aid organisations and how to prevent potential ethical concerns** and the reputation of organisations, including with a view to the host community. There is evidence that lack of coordination among aid organisations in Agadez has limited access because multiple field workers send different messages creating suspicions.

Recommendations to implementing partners (IPs)

Gap in service provision	Recommendations
<p>Lack of clarity around targeting and access strategies creates a risk that the programme is not reaching vulnerable groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop clear vulnerability criteria for different programming hubs to define which groups the programme understands to be the most vulnerable. • Develop access strategies for reaching different types of vulnerable migrants. This could draw on a stakeholder mapping exercise for key programming hubs to identify entry-points for reaching different vulnerable migrants. For instance, for migrants in jail, this could include local paralegals, rights organisations, or intermediaries with access to jails. • Use Research, Analysis, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (RAMEL) to identify who the programme is not reaching and adapt strategies. This can be done by adapting RAMEL tools to capture information on different vulnerabilities, and integrating this information into learning strategies – for instance, add as a standing item at learning fora (e.g. monthly meetings, programme reviews, learning workshops).
<p>First responders struggle to detect vulnerable migrants because they have to rely on the “first look” at migration intersections. More complex models of targeting are likely to run into challenges being implemented in the field.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train field workers on identifying a wider range of vulnerabilities, regardless of their organisation’s specific mandate, and specifically with a view to identifying vulnerabilities less visible at a first look. This would allow for not leaving vulnerable migrants behind and improving referrals to relevant actors following detection and first contact with migrants. • Opportunities for shared training courses include ongoing trainings for the Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability (DoMV) organised by the IOM.
<p>Lack of coordination and/or clear messaging in key migration hubs leads to ineffective referrals. First responders lack information about the services other organisations provide or the targeting criteria used by all organisations. This also appears to contribute to misconceptions that may create suspicions among migrants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a shared strategy and coordination plan through existing Migration Protection Working Groups. This strategy should include, at a minimum: i) a mapping of visits in key migration intersections, ii) clear referral pathways, iii) common procedures for sharing research and analysis, detection of vulnerabilities, approach to smuggling actors, local government, and local organisations (including migrant associations), and iv) a strategy on building trust with key actors. • Map referral pathways and share targeting criteria for each organisation, so that referrals can be effective. This can be done by hosting a workshop that brings together all relevant actors. • Nominate a single actor that could be in charge of screening migrants in main transit intersections; leading referral processes; and staying updated on new actors, target groups and changes in focal points within organisations.
<p>Tools to monitor and understand vulnerabilities are not being used to adapt targeting strategies and to adapt associated access strategies to the most vulnerable migrants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a regular process for updating vulnerability criteria and making it a living document. Define: i) sources for monitoring vulnerabilities; ii) process for reviewing targeting; iii) roles and responsibilities within the process; iv) a timeframe. For instance, this process could be integrated into (bi-)annual programme reviews. • This could take place through an organisation that acts as focal point for the rest of the area coordination platform, or through an independent coordination team co-funded by all organisations with

	<p>Research, Analysis, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (RAMEL) capacity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use contextual analysis to identify scenarios and related mitigation strategies or programmatic adaptations which can be quickly implemented if required. A good example is the Emergency Plan of Action implemented by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and a range of national Red Cross societies. The IFRC adapts its response depending on weekly reports from local staff at the border and regularly re-develops scenario planning of future contextual changes.¹
<p>Migrants appear to lack trust in humanitarian actors and local governments amid fears of being returned. In part, this is due to misperceptions that organisations force migrants to return.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing coordination platforms to organise day-to-day coverage at bus stations, ghettos, and key neighbourhoods to clearly communicate available support assistance by different aid organisations and to prevent misconceptions and misinformation that may create suspicions among migrants. IPs should also consider joint visits in migrant hubs to inform audiences about the entire range of support services available and inform migrants about the organisations' impartiality and voluntariness of AVRR. • When implementing programmes jointly or in coordination with the local government, consider whether public entities are perceived as neutral and well-intentioned by migrants.
<p>In Agadez, smugglers are often gatekeepers to migrants, including when they are at their most vulnerable. Many organisations engage but lack of coordination between organisations appears to further limit smugglers' willingness to engage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Political Economy Analyses (PEAs) on local smuggling dynamics in key programming hubs or segments along the CMR to understand the incentives, interests and needs of actors in the smuggling network. • Establish a clear organisational policy on when and how to engage with smugglers based on existing evidence. Use this policy as a basis for coordinating with other organisations and working towards a shared approach for engaging with smugglers.
<p>In Ouagadougou, working with migrant associations and volunteers appears to be a promising practice for reaching vulnerable migrants but there is a need for more sustained engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen contact and exchange with migrant associations both at informal and institutional levels and do regular "check-ins" to ensure the relationship is maintained. • Communicate on what services they can and cannot offer to migrants and provide clear and transparent information on the criteria for receiving assistance. Referrals by migrant associations will be inefficient and can undermine migrants' trust if expectations for support are not met.

¹ KI Panama Red Cross, October 2019.

Recommendations to donors

Key Gap	Recommendations
<p>Evidence suggests targeting and access strategies (specifically coordination issues) have continued to pose key challenges to migration programming. Some stakeholders noted a lack of clarity on targeting at the programme level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify policy on targeting and provide clear direction to implementers on what success looks like for programmes that target transit migrants. This could be facilitated by commissioning a review of data on vulnerabilities among different groups within migration flows and using it to set clearer targets at the programme level. • Convene working groups with experts and programme stakeholders during design phases of programmes focused on developing clear targeting and access strategies. For migration programming, these could include: i) defining new programmatic approaches, including those based on a route-based logic; ii) defining a clear policy on targeting (including for local populations and specific sub-groups) for different areas where the programme is working; and iii) detailing strategies for access, including on complex issues, focusing on engaging smugglers and working with local authorities.
<p>Lack of trust due to misperceptions of humanitarian actors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission further research on issues surrounding trust to develop effective strategies. Different topics could include: i) perceptions of migrant-targeted support programmes; ii) the role of host communities in creating trust and accessing vulnerable migrants; iii) impact on trust of linking immediate humanitarian assistance with return programming; and iv) investigating different levels of trust in different community actors (including humanitarian organisations), to identify effective entry points for service delivery to migrants.
<p>Vulnerabilities are likely to be highest among stranded, expelled migrants. Vulnerabilities are also highest later in the route. There is also evidence that stranded and expelled migrants are particularly vulnerable to financial, physical and mental stress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate greater shares of funding towards key programming hubs later in the route. Assistance should be available along the route but evidence suggests this is where needs and tensions are highest. • Fund increased programming tailored to the situation of expelled and stranded migrants. This could be facilitated by targeted needs assessments. • Create an area-based strategy for key programming hubs where needs are high and complex that explicitly detail priorities. Strategies could draw on an analysis of needs of different population groups (migrants with different types of vulnerability, local residents, local authorities) and work done by different actors. Strategies could draw from: i) a review of evidence; ii) commissioning additional research, including PEAs and stakeholder mapping exercises; and iii) consultations with key actors within each hub. Strategies could include explicit coordination mechanisms. Developing on the
<p>Security personnel are key sources of abuse for migrants along the CMR.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy to address the role of local government entities in causing harm to migrants. This could include making funding for programming to government actors conditional on spot checks.