

## African migration to Chad: Diversity of ethnic groups as one of the motives for the choice of migrants

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**Abstract.** The mobility of the population of the African continent is not a new phenomenon. Intra-African migration has a close relationship with mobility, as every migrant dreams of better social, economic, and political conditions. In this article, the author touches on the topic of the diversity of ethnic groups and languages as one of the motives for migrants to choose the Republic of Chad. Chad is a link between the Maghreb and Black Africa, and a crossroads of trans-Saharan caravans and a cradle of nomadic civilizations. Today, emigration and immigration movements between Chad, Libya, Sudan, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria constitute a basis of migratory dynamics. Chad is the first country to admit asylum seekers in Africa with a high number of refugees and asylum seekers which represents more than 3% of the Chadian population. The Republic of Chad was also an important stop on the pilgrimage route. There were many Muslims of African descent who made their way to the pilgrimage through Chad. Historical movements between the Republic of Chad and its neighboring countries provide an understanding of today's movements. These movements constitute the basis of the migratory dynamic of the Republic of Chad. The fact that we find shared communities on both sides of the border allows us to say that these particularly important cross-border exchanges are worth studying. Also, Chad alone has around 474,000 refugees and asylum seekers. Even if over the past two years the measures taken to fight the spread of the coronavirus infection (COVID-19) have slowed down the migration movement, the Republic of Chad now ranks among the top 10 countries of asylum in the world.

**Keywords:** Chad, ethnic groups, linguistic diversity, migration to Chad, intra-African migration, institutional capacities

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## Африканская миграция в Чад: разнообразие этнических групп как один из мотивов выбора мигрантов

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**Аннотация.** Исторические перемещения между Чадом и соседними странами дают представление о сегодняшних перемещениях, которые составляют основу миграционной динамики в Чаде. Тот факт, что мы находим общие сообщества по обе стороны границы, позволяет нам сказать, что эти важные трансграничные обмены заслуживают изучения. Кроме того, только в Чаде находятся около 474 000 беженцев и просителей убежища. Даже если за последние два года меры, принятые для борьбы с распространением коронавирусной инфекции (COVID-19), замедлили миграционное движение, Чад сейчас входит в топ-10 стран-убежищ в мире. Автор затрагивает тему разнообразия этнических групп и языков как один из мотивов выбора мигрантами Республики Чад.

**Ключевые слова:** Чад, этнические группы, языковое разнообразие, миграция в Чад, внутриафриканская миграция, институциональный потенциал

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### INTRODUCTION

Internal African migration movements to Chad and its border states form the basis of the migration dynamics of the Republic of Chad. These important cross-border mobility and exchanges explain that there are common communities on both sides of the border. Even if the numbers show that these migrations are quantitatively low, it should be noted that Chad is a country of emigration, immigration, and transit [1] for nationals of sub-Saharan Africa who seek to emigrate to North Africa and to go beyond, to Europe, as well as for nationals of West Africa and

East Africa who wish to reach the Middle East, in particular Saudi Arabia, Chad can be considered as a practically obligatory passage.

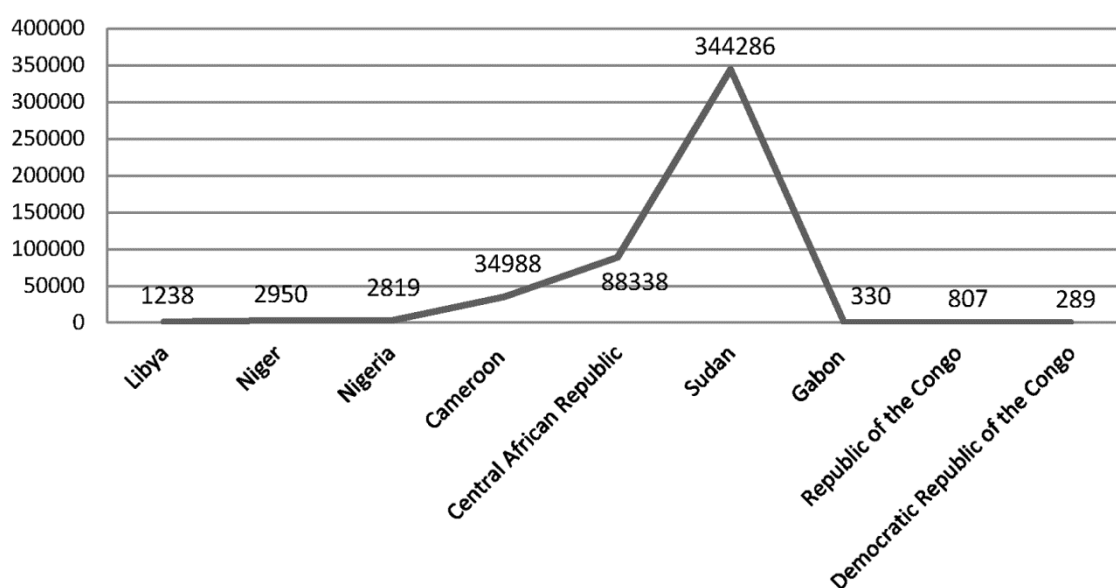
### MIGRATION STATISTICS IN CHAD

In the following proposals, we can look at the basic statistics of migration in Chad provided by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA):

- Immigration and emigration: the total number of international migrants in mid-2020 was 547.5 thousand people; the share of international migrants in the total population of 2020 was 3.3%; the total number of emigrants who left the country in 2020 was 222.3 thousand; net migration over the previous 5 years (the difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants) in 2019 was 10 thousand; the proportion of women among international migrants in 2020 was 54.4%; the proportion of international migrants aged 19 and under residing in the country / region in mid-2020 was 29.1% and the proportion of international migrants aged 65 and over in mid-2020 was 3.5%;

- Forced migration: the total number of refugees by destination countries in 2020 was 442.7 thousand people; the total number of refugees by country of origin in 2020 was 11.2 thousand. It is important to note that according to International Migrant Stock, these statistics refer to stocks of international migrants and that stocks include all residents born abroad in a country, regardless of the date on which they entered the country. For countries where data on the foreign-born population is not available, International Migrant Stock uses data on foreign citizens. As such, the number of international migrants may not include second generation migrants born in the country but those whose parents have migrated. Thus data on stocks should not be confused with data on annual migratory flows [2].

Indeed, according to the Global Migration Stock in 2017 (see *Figure 1*), internal migration to Chad was 489,690 people, and immigrants in Chad accounted for 3.30% of the total resident population.



**Figure 1. Number of intra-African migrants to Chad during 2017.**

Source: Global migration stock. <https://www.iom.int/fr/la-migration-dans-le-monde>

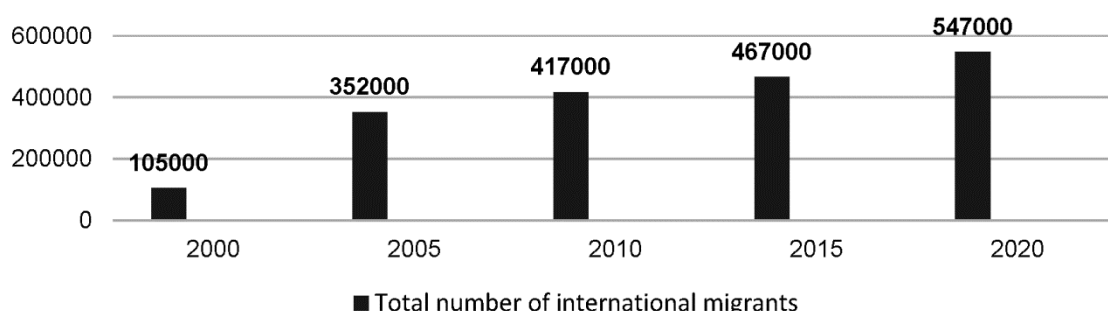
Migration to Chad is explained by socio-economic, political reasons and by the search for means of adaptation to environmental difficulties, poverty, the lack of activities and opportunities in the countries of departure. It should be noted that Chad and its neighboring countries share almost the same culture, tradition, and language. One can find related ethnic groups in Chad and neighboring countries such as Sudan, Central Africa, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger. This explains the reason we have a large number of Chadians as evidenced by the predominantly Chadian neighborhoods in large cities such as Maiduguri in Nigeria, Maroua, Garoua, Ngaoundere in Cameroon and the capitals of neighboring countries such as Khartoum in Sudan, Bangui in the Central African Republic, and Tripoli in Libya.

Very often, nationals of border countries who come to work in Chad are attracted to the country because of the richness of the land, the dynamism of economic and mining activities, especially oil, and the resources offered by Lake Chad.

Even if the rate of migrants from the Republic of Chad is exceptionally low, we can see that for a variety of reasons, Chadians leave the country to overcome various difficulties. According to the Global Migration Stock in 2017, Libya received 879 migrants, Niger - 883, Nigeria - 30,050, Cameroon - 76,601, Sudan - 87,884, the Central African Republic welcomed 10,910, and the Republic of Congo - 10,723 Chadian migrants. Also, other countries beyond the border of Chad received Chadian migrants: Gabon welcomed 3057,7 migrants, 721 moved to Benin and 313 Chadian migrants were received in Egypt [3].

Chad also welcomes not only African migrants or migrants from neighboring countries, but also international migrants. According to UN DESA data source, the total number of international migrants in Chad in mid-2020 was 547.5 thousand.

In the Figure 2 we can see the total number of international migrants in Chad during the last 25 years (from 2000 to 2020)<sup>1</sup>.



**Figure 2. Number of international migrants in Chad (2000-2020).**

Source: [https://migrationdataportal.org/fr/data?focus=profile&t=2020&i=stock\\_abs\\_&cm49=148](https://migrationdataportal.org/fr/data?focus=profile&t=2020&i=stock_abs_&cm49=148) (accessed 29.06.2021)

It is important to specify that among the international migrants represented on the diagram, the majority are African migrants from neighboring countries.

We must not forget that the civil war in Chad in the 90s had a major impact on the lives of many people and caused the displacement of thousands of Chadians to neighboring countries. These neighboring countries welcomed the Chadians during this difficult period. The Chadians who left the country in the 1990s until today did not return to Chad, they settled in those countries they migrated to. They have their family, their projects and their business and they are in direct contact with their relatives in Chad. Often, they facilitate the reception of their relatives. They support them by looking for jobs or universities that will welcome Chadian migrants [4].

#### INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES FOR MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Today's migratory movements are a global phenomenon and Chad is no exception. Migration movements must be the subject of particular attention in Chad and in Central Africa in general. Due to the environmental degradation, migratory movements are likely to intensify. It is important that African countries provide national or even regional institutional responses to provide support to intra-African migrants.

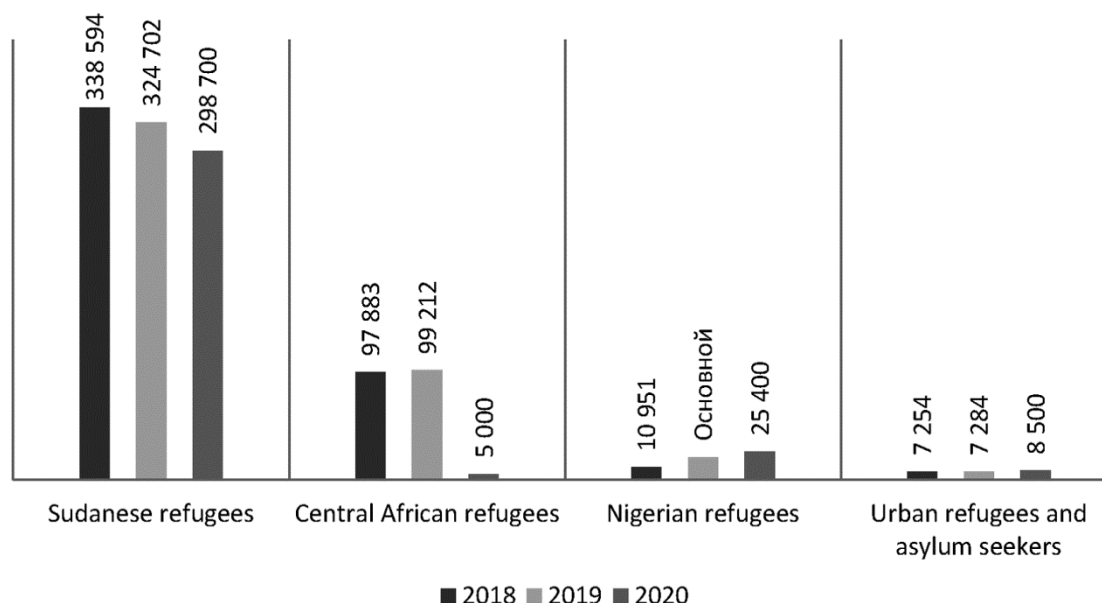
The Central African country also ranks among the 10 largest host countries for refugees in the world, and the number of refugees and asylum seekers represents more than 3% of the Chadian population. We can say that Chad is the first country that welcomed asylum seekers in Africa. It is important to recognize that the institutional capacities for managing migration in Chad remain weak, just like the legal and managerial framework to help the migrants. The legislative and regulatory reform work must be done, relying on national and international conventions ratified by Chad.

As the number of refugees and asylum seekers increase, thus representing more than 3% of the Chadian population, it is necessary that the Chadian government adopts a new law. In this vein, Chad has added a new Chadian legislation that deals with asylum, that is, from the reception of refugees to the provision of long-term solutions to them. This legislation thus ensures protection, freedom of movement, the right to health, education, access to justice and to documents. This new law also allows Chad to help groups of refugees as well as individuals.

In 2020, Chad had 337,600 refugees and asylum seekers on its territory, including 298,700 Sudanese from Darfur, 5,000 Central Africans mainly in the south, 25,400 Nigerians in Lake Chad province and more than 8,500 refugees and asylum seekers from Cameroon, Niger and some other African countries.

<sup>1</sup> The UN DESA data source. [https://migrationdataportal.org/fr/data?focus=profile&t=2020&i=stock\\_abs\\_&cm49=148](https://migrationdataportal.org/fr/data?focus=profile&t=2020&i=stock_abs_&cm49=148) (accessed 29.06.2021)

We cannot afford not to say that Chad has set a notable example this time around with the adoption of a pioneering law that significantly advances practices in the protection of asylum seekers and refugees in Chad. The UNHCR and several other organizations claim that this law conforms to international instruments and standards, such as the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention.



**Figure 3. Statistics of refugees and asylum seekers in Chad.**

Source: Chad: country response plan for refugees 2019-2020. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Chad%20Country%20RRP%202019-2020%20-%20March%202019.pdf> (accessed 29.06.2021)

#### THE MOTIVES FOR THE CHOICE OF MIGRANTS

The author agrees with the opinion of the Russian researchers A.Vishnevsky (Professor, HSE University, Moscow) and M.Denisenko (HSE University, Moscow), that migration processes have always played a huge role in the history of mankind. This is because migration has led to the settlement of people from one point of the planet to another. They have led to the formation of various peoples and cultures, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the modern world [5].

Regarding Chad and Africans in general, we have to underline the fact that ethnic groups were separated by colonial delimitations, and this underlies the reason for which we can meet the same ethnic groups in different African countries today. This is a primary reason some people choose to migrate to countries where they can meet their grandparents. That is, the ethnic structure of migration flows can become increasingly diverse.

Today, when we observe the ethno-linguistic map of the Central African region, it is more homogeneous. And it is important to note that during the XII-XIX centuries, there were numerous migrations of the Africans and a modern ethnolinguistic map of Central Africa was formed.

It must be admitted that in the Chad linguistic diversity, it is considered as one of the characteristics of the population of the country of Chad. There are more than 130 languages (and many dialects) divided into three major linguistic families: Hamito-Semitic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Congolese. It should be noted that only 18 of the 130 languages are spoken by 50,000 speakers or more:

- The languages of the Hamito-Semitic family cover a considerable geographical area, is also called Afro-Asian or Afrasian which extends from Northern Africa, more precisely, from the Maghreb to Nigeria and part of Cameroon, through Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, on the island of Malta, as well as throughout the Middle East, to the borders of Iran. The Hamito-Semitic languages constitute one of the great linguistic families on the African continent;

The languages of the Hamito-Semitic family are spoken by the Chadian Arabs who represent more than 10.3% of the Chadian population, the Moussei - more than 2.4%, the Marba - more than 1.7%, the Massana - more than 1.5% and the Nanchere - more than 0.9% of the Chadian population [6];

- Regarding the languages of the Nilo-Saharan or Nilotic family, we must note that it includes nearly 10 linguistic groups in which are distributed nearly 200 languages spoken by people living mainly in Niger, Sudan, in Ethiopia, Chad and Congo-Kinshasa.

The language of the Nilo-Saharan or Nilotic family are spoken by the Sara who represents more than 10.3% the Chadian population, the Kanembou - more than 5.3%, the Daza - more than 3.8%, the Maba - 3.4%, the Naba - more than 3.2%, Kanouri - more than 1.2% Zagawa as well as Gor (or bodo) - more than 1%, Massalit - more than 0.7%, Mango - more than 0.6% of the Chadian population [7];

- And finally, the languages of the Niger-Congolese family are divided into 7 main groups with more than 490 languages in total, spoken by more than 104 million speakers. We can say that three Africans out of four have a Niger-Congolese language as their mother tongue.

The languages of the Niger-Congolese family are spoken by the Moundan who represents more than 2.2%, the Fulani - more than 1.7% and the Toubouri represent - more than 1.2% of the Chadian population [8].

Other more precise examples of the various ethnic groups of Chad include: the Djellaba, the so-called Madjabra (Fizan), the Bornouans, the Hausa, the Tuareg called here Kinnine and the Peuls called here Fallata who participated in the Trans-Saharan and Inter-Saharan trade. Sahélien (West-East) are from present-day Sudan, present-day Libya and the basins of Lake Chad and Niger.

Abeche, which is now the second largest city in Chad after the capital N'Djamena, and the third largest city economically, was also a crossroads, an important stop on the pilgrimage route. There were many Muslims of African origin who were on their way to the pilgrimage passing through the town of Abeche, which was as a reception and transit center. The pilgrims who went to Mecca walked a few kilometers and stopped, got supplies, worked a little, and they got a little money to continue their journey. At other times, some found a favorable situation and settled down permanently.

Some physical evidence indicates that the Chadian Arabs entered Chad through Kanem (the origins of their presence, the relays, the stages of dispersal and regrouping. It was a very long process, if we remember that before the end of the XIVth century, Arab groups were already nomadic in the Lake Chad region) in the Fezzan region (the south of modern Libya) which was also a region under the Kanem-Bornu empire (in XIII-XIX centuries).

The ancestors of the Arab tribes who now reside in this region arrived through the Sahara. Carbou<sup>2</sup> regroups these tribes under the name of Hasawna, named after a certain Hasan al-Gharbi, who would have been the leader of their original migration. Knowing that the Islamization of Kanem happened very early and was followed by the conversion to Islam of the major political entities of the region by its geographical position, both a pivot of economic exchanges in central Sudan, and the one of the gateways to Islam and Arabs. Arrived later by this route, the Awlad Sliman crossed the Sahara from Tripolitania at the beginning of the XIXth century to settle in Kanem in the northeast of Lake Chad [9].

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the author concludes that Chad has always had a tradition of welcoming refugees from neighboring countries without creating tension. Historical migration movements in Chad allow us to understand and influence the movements of today.

Today, emigration and immigration movements between Chad, Libya, Sudan, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria constitute a basis of migratory dynamics and can be explained by the fact that there are shared communities on both sides of the border. Until today, Chad hosts around 350,000 refugees, most of them driven out by war or terrorist attacks: almost 300,000 Sudanese in the east, more than 25,000 Nigerians fleeing the jihadist sect Boko Haram around Lake Chad, and 5,000 Central Africans in the south.

Chad is the first country to admit asylum seekers in Africa with a high number of refugees and asylum seekers which represents more than 3% of the Chadian population. Chad is a country strategically located in Africa, and on migratory routes to Libya and Europe. But at times refugees and migrants are exposed to a range of protection risks throughout their perilous journey from or through Chad. The lack of opportunities and prospects in the refugee hosting areas, the gradual reduction in humanitarian aid in recent years and the lack of prospects are pushing some refugees to leave the camps.

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<sup>2</sup> Henri Carbou was a colonial civil servant and ethnographer who undertook pioneering studies on the peoples of Chad and Sudan and their languages. The groups studied in this two-volume book include the Kanembou, the Toubou, the Ouaddai, the Arabs, and many others. Carbou's sources include his own observations, the works of Arab writers, and the earlier work of Europeans, including the two great German explorers of Central Africa, Heinrich Barth (1821-1865) and Gustav Nachtigal (1834-1885). Carbou's works are still used by scholars interested in the dialects of Chad and Sudan (*author's note*).



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