



Migration profile

MALI

A. Executive Summary

Mali is a landlocked country in western Africa where nearly half of the highly dispersed population lives in extreme poverty. At its peak in the 14th century, it was the largest and wealthiest empire in West Africa due to gold production and trade routes in the Sahel. In the late 16th century, Moroccans invaded the empire and divided it into independent sultanates and kingdoms. In the 1890s, France seized control of the area. The French colonisation was a powerful factor of displacement, particularly to recruit labour for the construction of infrastructure.ⁱ Finally in 1960, French Sudan gained independence from France and became the Mali Federation. However, when Senegal withdrew from this coalition after only a few months, the remaining area was renamed the Republic of Mali. The country endured 31 years of dictatorship until 1991, when a new constitution and multi-party democracy were established.ⁱⁱ Since the beginning of the war in 2012, there has been conflict among ethnic Tuaregs from the northern region, Islamist groups and the Malian army.ⁱⁱⁱ

Mali is mainly a country of emigration and transit migration.^{iv} The most recent data available dates back to 2019, when 25.3% of households reported having members living outside their area.^v Migration mostly involves male emigrants moving abroad, leaving women and children at their houses of origin.^{vi} Their destination countries are located in Central Africa (Gabon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Equatorial Guinea).^{vii} Within the European Union, 69% of Malian international migrants are in France, 23% in Spain, and 7% in Italy.^{viii} Mali's economic and social life are highly dependent on migrants' remittances.^{ix}

Immigrants living in Mali usually arrive from the Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania.^x In 2022, 52,680 persons with refugee status and 816 asylum seekers were registered in Mali, coming primarily from Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, the Central African Republic, and the Ivory Coast.^{xi} Moreover, by the end of 2022, 440,436 internal displacements were recorded in the country.^{xii}

Mali suffers from a number of environmental challenges, including desertification, drought, deforestation, soil erosion, inadequate supplies of drinking water, and flooding of the Niger River during the rainy season.^{xiii} Tensions between communities are exacerbated by climate change.^{xiv} The effects of the pandemic, poor agricultural performance, and human crisis impacted the Malian economy going into recession in 2020. Some improvements were made in 2021 thanks to good trades and the surge in international gold prices.^{xv} As of 2021, Mali's GDP amounted to US\$ 19,140,461,610, experiencing an annual growth rate of 3.1% of its GDP. The inflation rate was 3.9%, and foreign direct investment represented 3.3% of the GDP.^{xvi}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Mali is a landlocked western African country which borders Algeria to the north, Mauritania and Senegal to the west, Guinea and the Ivory Coast to the south, and Burkina Faso and Niger to the east. There are three geographical zones: the Sudanese in the southeast, the Sahelian bordering the Sahara to the north, and the Saharan in the north.^{xvii} It is administratively divided into eight regions and one capital district (Bamako).^{xviii}

It has an area of 1,220,190 sq. km, and a population of 23,087,541. Bamako is the capital and largest city.^{xix} Although French is the official language, there are at least 40 African languages spoken.^{xx} Mande languages are the most common ones. The majority use Bambara, followed by Malinke, Khasonke, Wasulunka, and Soninke. Other African languages are grouped in the Gur and the Atlantic branches.^{xxi} More than 90% of the population are Muslims. Minor religions include Animism, Christianity and other indigenous beliefs.^{xxii} ^{xxiii} Concerning ethnicity, Bambara is the largest group (37%). Other clusters include Fula (17%), Voltaic (12%), Songhai (6%), and the Tuareg and Moor (10%).^{xxiv}

II. International and Internal Migration

According to the UN International Migrant Stock estimates, as of 2020, there were 485,829 migrants living in the Republic of Mali, encompassing 2.29% of the country's population. Among them, there were 246,308 men (50.7% of the stock) and 239,521 women (49.3% of the stock). Their most common country of origin was by far the Ivory Coast (195,271 people, representing 40.19% of the migrant stock, and 0.92% of Mali's total population). Next in line were Burkina Faso (62,291 people, 12.82% of the migrant stock), Guinea (41,960 people, 8.64% of the stock), Senegal (24,457 people, 5.03% of the stock), and Mauritania (24,197 people, 4.98% of the stock).^{xxv}

The *Institut National de la Statistique* (Instat), Mali's official statistical agency, does not provide any general figures pertaining to the country's migrant stock, but it does conduct regional surveys that offer vital information. In December 2021, Instat conducted a study on the living conditions of migrants in the regions of Kayes and Sikasso, and the city of Bamako (an area hosting over 40% of Mali's population, as well as a significant migrant presence). The survey reported that the main country of origin of migrants living in the area was Burkina Faso, there were more men than women among them, and most of them were single, low-skilled, and between 25 and 64 years old. Many immigrants came alone, and their pull-factors were primarily economic (accessing better employment opportunities, etc.). Their most common jobs were in the mining (70%), trade (15%), and agriculture (7%) sectors. 45% were salaried employees, while 43% were self-employed.^{xxvi} Another Instat research study conducted in December 2022 showed that their economic situation had somehow shifted. Now most of them were self-employed, and hospitality and construction became their main employment sectors (along with mining), while trade and agriculture jobs were less sought out.^{xxvii}

Both surveys mention certain problems and abuses faced by a significant percentage of migrants: access to housing or working unpaid extra hours were quite recurrent difficulties; lacking any type of personal document was even very frequent. Also, some of them became targets of racism and/or violence, even though most of them did not experience it.^{xxviii}^{xxix}

Monitoring of border-crossing checkpoints has allowed identifying some specific migration patterns. Firstly, seasonal migration is prevalent in the sector of agriculture: a significant contingent of migrants from Senegal and Burkina Faso (and Malians residing abroad) cross Mali's borders every year to work in the fields. Most of them are female and/or under 20 years old. Secondly, Mali's territory is used as a transit country by people coming from Guinea, the Ivory Coast, and Gambia, then crossing into Mauritania or Algeria through Timbuktu, and heading towards the Mediterranean Sea and finally trying to reach Europe.^{xxx}

Internal migration seems to be a widespread phenomenon. According to a 2019 Instat survey, an estimated 6.1% of people settled in their current location after living elsewhere in the country. Mobility to urban areas (13.7% of the people on the move) is higher than to rural ones (3.4%). It is also higher for men (6.3%) than for women (5.8%).^{xxxi}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

There is no official data regarding emigration in 2021 or 2020.^{xxxii} In 2019, 25.3% of households reported having members living outside their local area, 12.4% had exclusively internal migrants, 9.1% exclusively international migrants, and 3.3% were both internal and international. Rural households were more affected by migration (27.9%) than urban ones (19.3%). Emigrants from Mali come mainly from Kayes (38% of Malian emigrants).^{xxxiii} Their migration patterns are characterised by male emigrants moving to other regions or countries due to economic reasons, leaving women and children behind at their houses of origin. On many occasions, children under 20 years old are in charge of running the family home.^{xxxiv}

Colonisation was an important factor of displacement in Mali. In fact, there was a high demand of working migrants involved in the construction of infrastructure to provide Mali with mobile routes and international connections. Likewise, France's demand for labour increased emigration from this country.^{xxxv} In recent years, however, emigration has been shifting towards other African countries, even to the ones not bordering Mali. Emigrants have especially relocated to Central Africa (Gabon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Equatorial Guinea).^{xxxvi} Between 2011 and 2016, there was a decrease in emigration flows towards France.^{xxxvii} In 2020, around 170,000 Malians lived in OECD countries.^{xxxviii} Within the European Union, 69% of Malian international migrants were in France, 23% in Spain, and 7% in Italy.^{xxxix}

Emigration plays a significant role in Mali's economic and social life. It allows social and economic emancipation as well as diversification of sources of income and insurance in case of climatic hazards, thanks to remittances.^{xl} In 2021, they represented 5.9% of Mali's GDP.^{xli} Remittances contribute to reducing poverty in the country, but they also increase existing inequalities as mainly the richest quintile of households benefit from transfers.^{xlii} Emigration is ranked 5th of the principal coping strategies for household food insecurity (7.4% of them in urban areas and 9.1% in rural ones.)^{xliii}

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

In 2022, 52,680 persons with refugee status and 816 asylum seekers were registered in Mali.^{xliv} They mainly came from Burkina Faso (41.86%), Mauritania (28.38%), Niger (25.79%), the Central African Republic (2.22%), and the Ivory Coast (0.93%).^{xlv} Ongoing insecurity, climate shocks, and local conflicts have displaced thousands of people in the country looking for

protection.^{xlvi} At the end of February 2023, the total number of refugees in Mali stood at 63,222 persons and 888 asylum seekers.^{xlvii}

Mali's legislation recognises refugee and asylum status, and the government has established a system to protect refugees in the country.^{xlviii} Mali has offered naturalisation to Mauritanian refugees and supported the voluntary return of refugees coming from Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and Mauritania.^{xlix} By the end of 2022, 84,898 returns were registered.¹

In June 2022, the government ended the *prima facie* refugee status for the Ivorian population.^{li}

Refugees and migrants can transit through the territory, although in certain areas where there is little control by the authorities, refugees and migrants are at risk of abuse, and violence occurs regularly.^{lii} In addition, the government's National Directorate of Social Development is responsible for providing temporary protection to persons who do not qualify as refugees.^{liii}

Furthermore, Mali remains the epicentre of the prolonged crisis in Central Sahel,^{liv} driven by conflict and insecurity, resulting in large-scale population displacement of both the Malian and local refugee populations, climate crises and epidemics, and very high levels of food and nutrition insecurity.^{lv} At the end of 2021, 249,174 displacements caused by conflict and violence, as well as 5,994 of people affected by flood-related climate disasters were recorded.^{lvi} Moreover, by the end of 2022, 440,436 internal displacements were reported in the country.^{lvii}

In northern Mali, in the village of Tillit, violent attacks have forced more than 3,700 Burkinabe and local Malian refugees to flee to Gao. The displaced people have been living under trees or in makeshift shelters with little food and water.^{lviii} Other areas of the country, where there has been a significant increase in internal displacement, include Kidal, Mopti, Koulikoro, and Ségou.^{lix}

Finally, 200,471 refugees coming from Mali were registered in 2022. Their main destinations were Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Italy, and France.^{lx}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Mali is Tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report since it does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but is making significant efforts to do so. Internal trafficking is a frequent phenomenon in the country. Sex trafficking increases especially in mining communities due to cultural and religious beliefs linking sex with increased chances of finding gold. They also exploit boys in forced labour in informal gold mines, particularly in Gao and Kidal. Some children are sold by their families into forced labour and domestic servitude. Traffickers exploit men and boys, primarily of Songhai ethnicity, in a long-standing practice of debt bondage in the salt mines of Taoudenni in northern Mali. Terrorist organisations and armed groups continue to recruit and use children, mostly boys, in combat. They also use girls in combat, support roles, and sexual exploitation (including sexual slavery through forced marriages to members of these armed groups).^{lxi}

Furthermore, labour traffickers exploit boys from Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso in agriculture, artisanal gold mines, domestic work, transportation, begging, and the informal commercial sector. Corrupt Quranic teachers exploit boys originally from Mali or neighbouring countries, like Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, and Senegal. Children are also exploited in cotton and cocoa farms in the Ivory Coast. Moreover, Malian women and girls

are exploited in sex trafficking in Gabon, Libya, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Women and girls are recruited from West African countries (particularly Nigeria and Benin) with promises of jobs as nurses or waitresses in Bamako, or beauty parlours in Europe or the United States. In January 2019, Nigerian authorities estimated that more than 20,000 Nigerian girls became victims of sex trafficking in Mali. In 2017, a Malian armed group forcibly recruited Malian refugees in Mauritania to be child soldiers in Mali. Unaccompanied children among IDPs are at very high risk of recruitment by armed groups operating in Mali. Slaveholders subjected some members of Mali's Black Tuareg community to slavery practices rooted in traditional relationships of hereditary servitude. According to an international organisation report, there are approximately 300,000 victims of hereditary slavery in Mali.

In 2021, the government initiated 29 cases and pursued another 50 left unsolved from previous years. It prosecuted 41 alleged traffickers and convicted 14 of them. NGOs assisted 104 identified trafficking victims by providing shelter. They operated ten transit centres for adult and child victims of crime, including one specialised for female adult trafficking victims in Bamako. Services included short-term shelter, food, counselling, transportation, repatriation, and reintegration assistance. The government adopted a national referral mechanism with standard procedures to identify and refer trafficking victims to receive proper care. In 2023, it allocated more funding for anti-trafficking efforts, and it partnered with an international organisation to identify children recruited and used by armed groups. In 2021, the government also held awareness campaigns and training on child-forced begging perpetrated by community leaders and Quranic teachers. However, despite these efforts, the government is still encountering major difficulties. There are widespread reports of corruption and complicity among officials, including Malian armed forces personnel engaged in child sex trafficking. For the third consecutive year, the government did not take any steps to amend the anti-trafficking law to explicitly define hereditary slavery as a form of human trafficking.

VI. National Legal Framework

Citizenship in Mali is governed by Law No. 2011-087 under the "Code des Personnes et de la Famille". The Code repealed the 1962 "Code de la Nationalité" as modified in 1995.^{lxii} Law No. 04-058 relating to the Conditions of Entry, Stay and Establishment of Foreigners in the Republic of Mali manages all types of migration flows in and out of the country.^{lxiii} Decree No. 0901/PRM of 2018 on the National Policy on African Integration handles the free movement of people. Mali adopted the Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (2019–2023) and the Action Plan for the National Migration Policy of Mali (2020–2024), which address and manage most migration-related issues.^{lxiv}

The Labour Code in Mali and Law No. 09-015 of 2009 outline the rights of migrant workers and their families. The 2012-2013 Law Relating to the Combat against Trafficking in Persons and Similar Practices criminalises sex and labour trafficking. Mali also established the 2018-2022 National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.^{lxv}

The Republic of Mali is a state party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 2000 UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, including its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, the 1954 UN Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the 1961 UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Mali also signed the

1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.^{lxvi}

The Government of Mali prioritised the conclusion of bilateral agreements on the transferability of migrants' social rights to combat migrant smuggling in the ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States and the African Union.^{lxvii} It ratified the CIPRES Inter-African Conference on Social Welfare and concluded a social security agreement with France.

Mali is a party to the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the 2018 Protocol to the Treaty establishing the African economic community relating to the free movement of persons, right of residence, and right of establishment, the Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.^{lxviii}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The main administrative actor in charge of migration management is the Ministry of Malians Abroad and African Integration (MMEIA). Its Ministerial Department in Charge of the Management of the Diaspora is responsible for the implementation of policies aimed at ensuring the participation of expatriate Malians in the country's further development and the facilitation of their socio-economic reintegration when they return, as well as the protection of Malians living abroad. MMEIA includes the General Delegation of Malians whose mission is to draw up the guidelines of the national policy for the administration, assistance, protection, and promotion of Malians living abroad, and to ensure the coordination and control of diplomatic and consular missions that contribute to the implementation of this policy. The Directorate of Legal Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, created in 2000, is in charge of international treaties and agreements, including those concerning migration. The High Council of Malians Living Abroad has the goal to help maintain solidarity among Malians living abroad and to involve the Malian diaspora in the development of their country.^{lxix}

Law No. 2019-047 of 2019 established the Centre for Migration Information and Management (CIGEM), whose goal is to improve knowledge of migratory phenomena, to welcome, inform, guide and accompany potential and returning migrants, to provide information on the legal conditions of migration and raise public awareness to prevent irregular migration, and to develop the human, financial and technical capital of Malians abroad. The National Population Directorate is part of the Ministry of Planning and Territorial Development, and its mission is to outline the elements supporting the national population policy and migration.^{lxx}

International Organisations

The International Committee of the Red Cross provides shelter, food, and access to drinking water in camps prepared for internally displaced people in Mali.^{lxxi}

UNHCR Mali works to address the pressing needs of forcibly displaced persons in the process of voluntary return and their reintegration, as well as local integration opportunities for refugees when conditions allow them. UNHCR in Mali also focuses on asylum issues and

supports the government by strengthening the legal and normative framework, and enhancing its protection capacity in compliance with international protection standards.^{lxxii}

The IOM Mali's operations are set by the 2021-2024 IOM National Strategic Plan, aiming to contribute to safe, orderly, and humane migration through a holistic approach to migration and forced displacement around three fundamental pillars: resilience, mobility, and governance. IOM has a central office in Bamako and six branches in Gao, Kayes, Menaka, Mopti, Sikasso, and Timbuktu. In 2022, the IOM Mali's team carried out proximity actions, serving the needy populations. It also publishes an annual report describing actions and projects implemented on behalf of people of concern.^{lxxiii}

Due to the number of stateless children in the country, UNICEF promotes connections between health services and civil registration services to ensure that all babies born in Mali are officially registered within the legal deadlines and receive birth certificates.^{lxxiv} In emergency situations, UNICEF in Mali provides medical, food, psychosocial, and educational support for the most vulnerable children in conflict-affected zones. UNICEF also offers direct support to child victims of violence, abuse, and exploitation.^{lxxv}

NGOs and Other Organisations

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is one of the most prominent global NGOs among those involved in helping and supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced populations. Its presence in Mali is very strong and solid, especially assisting people displaced by the country's armed conflicts. In 2021 alone, NRC provided assistance to 234,367 IDPs people in the country. Its 5 main interventions in Mali are: providing education to displaced children; legal aid and information and counselling in matters related to resettlement processes and resources available to vulnerable populations; livelihood support such as direct cash assistance or food provision; promotion of hygiene, sanitation and access to water; and provision of shelter, including help in homes-building.^{lxxvi}

Other global NGOs caring (internally or otherwise) for forcibly displaced populations in the context of Mali's conflict include the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Since 2012, this organisation has been providing emergency assistance and humanitarian aid to those affected by violence and uprooted from their homes in Malian territory –the organisation claims to have assisted over half a million displaced Malians since then. Recently, it has been focusing its efforts on the Koulikoro, Kidal, Gao, and Mopti regions. Among many other vital intervention programmes, IRC is devoted to providing vital healthcare services, clean drinking water (and water treatment kits), and adequate psychosocial support to help children and parents heal from trauma.^{lxxvii}

The Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA) is a global NGO focused on supporting extremely vulnerable populations through the provision of health-related services. It helps forcibly displaced populations by the Malian armed conflict through its intervention in at least two different African nations. In Mali, one of its main responsibilities is providing rapid emergency response to injuries suffered by internally displaced people. It is present too in the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and one of ALIMA's main activities in that country is providing primary medical and nutritional care, and sexual and reproductive health services, to Malian refugees living in the Mbera camp.^{lxxviii}

The Catholic Church

The Episcopal Conference of Mali is part of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa (RECOWA) together with the Episcopal Conference of Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Benin, Mali, Togo, Ghana, Gambia, and Sierra Leone.^{lxxix} RECOWA emphasised that human mobility is not only a phenomenon but it involves real people with real lives. They stated the importance of improving the precariousness of life in their countries of origin to prevent young people from being forced to migrate. They also pointed out that the role of the Church in this context is twofold: firstly, it must accompany migrants at every stage of their migration process; and secondly, the Church must also continually challenge and exhort the leaders of the countries whose decisions and actions make it difficult for their young people to live or remain in their homeland.^{lxxx}

Caritas' action in Mali focuses on relief initiatives and emergency humanitarian assistance, food security through the promotion of silos, environmental protection, accompaniment of farmers' organisations, rural development, national resource management, and awareness raising and facilitation in the areas of health and sanitation.^{lxxxi}

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Mali serves poor and vulnerable people by coordinating complex, multi-sectoral emergency and development programmes in almost all regions. CRS collaborates with 18 partners, including government ministries and national and international NGOs. CRS' work focuses on providing agricultural livelihoods, emergency response and recovery, health care, education, and resilience.^{lxxxii}

In emergency response and recovery, CRS devotes much of its efforts to providing rapid, life-saving responses and develops long-term projects that address both conflict and natural disasters, which generate significant internal population displacement. Mali faces crises related to conflict-related displacement in the centre and north of the country, as well as seasonal flooding and persistent drought. CRS conducts needs assessments in the immediate aftermath of disasters and shares information with humanitarian actors through the Kisili Project website to drive coordinated, life-saving responses.^{lxxxiii}

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D. Endnotes

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