

This research project is part of the “Safety, Support and Solutions along the Central Mediterranean Route” programme funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) which objectives include improving the understanding of migration trends by governments, humanitarian agencies and national organizations in a bid to formulate appropriate responses for vulnerable communities. Under this programme, six countries in West and Central Africa (Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal) conducted research projects in 2018 and 2019.



Female gold miners washing gravels in the Sikasso Region. Photo : IOM 2019

This research is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, through a three-phase data collection process:

- **Individual interviews** with gold miners (436)
- **Focus groups** with host communities, gold miners, pit leading hands, female sex workers, unaccompanied minors, representatives of NGOs and civil society organizations
- **Qualitative interviews** with key actors (local authorities, site managers, pit owners, association representatives).

INTRODUCTION

Artisanal gold mining in Mali is a growing activity which attracts migrants from all over the West African Subregion. With an estimated reserve of 900 tons and more than 60 tons produced in 2018, Mali is the third largest gold producer on the continent after South Africa and Ghana. Affected by declining agricultural production, for the majority of workers, gold mining is seen as a means of improving living conditions of their families, both in their communities of origin and within the sites.

The research aims to determine the migration profile of gold miners, routes to the mining sites, decision-making methods; and, identify the mobility patterns conducive to “gold fever”. It also seeks to assess the challenges related to vulnerable people protection around gold mining sites. Data collection took place between March and May 2019 in Sadiola and Kéniéba in Kayes Region, and in Kadiolo and Yanfolia in Sikasso Region.

GOLD MINER MIGRATION PROFILE

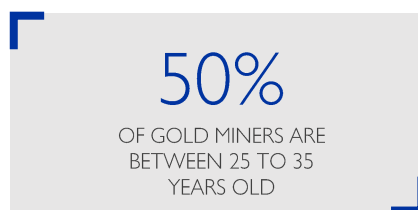
More than 70% of the respondents are young people aged 18 to 35.

Nearly 60% of them have no education. This indicates that the gold sites attract primarily a very low-skilled workforce with few job prospects in the country’s rural areas.

Thirty per cent (30%) of the respondents were self-employed and 17% were in the informal sector before arriving in the gold mining sites.



Gold mining is perceived as an opportunity to increase family incomes, achieve “well-being” or as a means of curbing the emigration of young Malians, including to Côte d’Ivoire.



Mobility to gold mining sites would be primarily a seasonal migration taking place mainly during the dry season, when agriculture is impracticable. This characteristic explains the high inter-site mobility of gold miners and their adaptability to opportunities from one season to the next. Furthermore, a significant proportion of migrants decide to settle permanently in gold mining sites with their families.

MIGRATION JOURNEYS TO GOLD MINING SITES

The gold miners interviewed during the survey are mainly Malians (48%) and come from within regions where the gold mining sites are located. **Indeed, among Malian gold miners, 33% are from Sikasso and 18% from Kayes.** This demonstrates the impact of mining activity in the surrounding localities.

Moreover, 31% of the migrants are from Burkina Faso, and 12% come from Guinea, **thus confirming the attractiveness of Malian sites in the subregion.**

Using mainly informal channels of information, such as word of mouth or contact with former gold miners, **56%** of the migrants reported having had contact with the site workers before their arrival.

The length of stay and the number of sites visited are all indications that characterize migration to gold mining sites. Thus, a significant proportion of gold miners have visited two or more sites since the beginning of their activity (32%). **Moreover, gold miners (45%) seem to stay one year or more in each site.** This demonstrates the relatively long nature of these migrations.

45%

OF GOLD MINERS INTENDED TO STAY IN THE SITES

UPSETS IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EQUILIBRIA LINKED TO MIGRATION TO GOLD MINING SITES

Gold mining offers many positive economic development opportunities for miners and surrounding communities, but it poses major risks to gold miners’ lives as well as to the environment and host communities.

In addition to the precarious living conditions in the sites and the high risk of incidents in mining pits, the expansion of gold mining destroys agricultural fields and reduces opportunities for income diversification.

Interviews with host community members indicated an increase in insecurity as well as in conflicts with traditional authorities. Gender-based robberies and assaults are also a matter of utmost concern.

44%

OF INDIVIDUALS EMPLOYED PRIOR THEIR MIGRATION TO THE SITE WORK IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

FEMALE SEX WORKERS

Focus groups with female sex workers around mine sites confirmed the existence of significant protection issues in these areas, often far from urban centres. Female sex workers work without any protection mechanisms and are exposed to exploitation and aggression from clients and their bosses. There is a potential existence of trafficking networks, as cases have already been identified by the authorities, including Nigerian women. **In-depth research with these young women is needed to determine their living conditions and to better understand how trafficking networks operate.**

“People suspected of sexual exploitation were apprehended by the population and handed over to the gendarmes.”

Interview with Kabaya site manager in Sikasso Region.

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Child exploitation is a serious issue at gold mining sites and is of serious concern to civil society organizations. Their massive presence is reflected in school drop-outs, which result in **an increase in illiteracy rates.** The survey revealed a lack of public confidence in educational institutions, in which miners see no opportunity to improve their future, unlike gold mining.

“The inconveniences of gold mining are perceptible in terms of education, depravity of societal values and morals. There are fewer schools, fewer prospects and less hope for many gold miners.”

Focus group with local authorities, commune of Wassolo Balé in Sikasso Region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. GOVERNANCE AND PREVENTION

- Enhance the presence of State services in gold mining sites and promote collaboration with traditional authorities for the management and organization of sites and migration flows.
- Encourage the development of awareness-raising and information programmes for gold miners on the dangers and risks associated with gold mining, specifically for unaccompanied minors and pregnant women.
- Promote community dialogue mechanisms for better representation of women in governance structures of gold miners and enable them to access all professions in sites.
- Promote alternative activity sectors, such as agriculture or handicrafts to enable communities to diversify their activities and stabilize their income.

2. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND SAFETY

- Establish health services adapted to the needs of gold miners.
- Support the Government in improving health infrastructure and access to drinking water.
- Establish control mechanisms for the compulsory wearing of protective equipment and prohibit the use of toxic products such as mercury.

3. PROTECTION OF FEMALE SEX WORKERS AND UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

- Promote regional and intersectoral research to better address the vulnerability of female sex workers and unaccompanied minors and dismantle trafficking networks.
- Conduct advocacy activities with the Government on the issue of school dropouts.