MALI

Destined to migrate

Exploring a culture of migration in
a world of migration restrictions

Kayes, Mali

March 2020

UK**aid**
from the British people

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About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT). For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.

About the Mixed Migration Centre

The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move. The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and global and regional MMC teams are hosted by the DRC offices in Amman, Bogota, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis and Yangon.

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SUMMARY

Building on a long history of migration in the West African region and towards Europe, the people of Kayes, Mali, have long been described as the *'ethnie migratoire par excellence'*.[1] Engaged in circular movements since the 1700s and to France since the 1950s, to the present day, Kayesiens remain the largest group of Malian nationals in Europe. In 2007, it was estimated that 80% of all Malians in France originated from the region of Kayes.[2] While previous migration from the region to Europe has predominantly been through regular channels, as of the 2010s Malian nationals have started to reach the European Union (EU) irregularly via the Mediterranean Sea. As of October 2019, Malians were among the top five most numerous nationalities of arrivals along the Western Mediterranean Sea route reaching Spain and the third most numerous, after Guinea Conakry and Cote d'Ivoire, among West African nationalities across all three Mediterranean Sea routes reaching the EU that same year.[3]

Longstanding migration patterns from Kayes to France have led to what many observers in the region call a 'culture of migration', a situation where *'migration becomes the norm and staying the exception'*.[4] This is particularly accentuated among the Soninke, the predominant ethnic group in Kayes. However, as France and the EU over recent decades have increasingly implemented more restrictive migration policies towards Malians (and African nationals more broadly), we must ask to what extent such policies have impacted the aspirations of young adults in Kayes to migrate. Further, as information campaigns have become one of several means of migration management in the region - including in Kayes - the question arises to what extent such campaigns are appropriate to the context in shaping the local perception of migration.

Funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), the aim of this study, conducted by REACH in collaboration with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), was to explore (1) the extent to which the 'culture of migration' contributes to migration aspirations in Kayes today; (2) how changes in migration policies in the EU have impacted (2.1) migration aspirations[5] and ability[6] to migrate and (2.2) migration decision-making, including choice of destination and *mode* of migration; and (3) the role of information campaigns in shaping the perception and decision-making process over migration in this context. The study adopted a qualitative methodology and is based on the reporting of a total of 145 respondents, reached through 110 individual interviews (IIs), 6 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 5 key informant (KI) discussions. The data collection was conducted in 11 villages in the region of Kayes between 13 October and 3 November 2019.

The impact of a 'culture of migration' on migration aspirations today

- **Perception of migration**: Migration was seen as extremely positive by the vast majority of individually interviewed respondents (99/110), all KIs and FGD participants. Respondents' positive perception originated from concrete, tangible examples in the village of the successes migration can bring, notably in terms of: migrants' investments in their family's houses, built of cement as opposed to clay (69/110); migrants' contributions to community infrastructure, such as schools, water holes and electricity networks (44/110) and the social mobility (29/110) migration had reportedly brought to community members who had migrants in the family.[7] Besides being examples of economic success, these investments were perceived as indications of manhood and prestige within the community.

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[1] English translation: 'Ethnic group on the move *par excellence*'.

[2] Cambrezy, M., Le Codéveloppement : de la pratique à la politique, 2007 ; CADEKAS, Répertoire des associations de la région de Kayes en France, 2007.

[3] Source: UNHCR, Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 (Mediterranean), October 2019. According to a review of data on irregular arrivals to Italy and residence permits issued to nationals of selected countries in Northern and Western Africa in the EU conducted by IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Center (GMDAC), between 2011 and 2017 more Malians reached Europe irregularly via sea than receiving residence permits on the continent, only one of three nationalities among ten reviewed for whom this was found to be the case. See GMDAC, African migration to the EU: Irregular migration in context, 2019.

[4] Kandel, W. and D.S. Massey. *The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis*. Social Forces 80:981–1004, 2002.

[5] The term 'migration aspirations' refers to a general preference for migration, following the conviction that leaving would be better than staying. A preference to migrate is only one possibility in which to channel the desire for change which is produced by conditions (or root causes), prospects for improvement, and life aspirations. Migration aspirations undergo several interlinked conceptualisations: they can be understood as a comparison of *places*, as a comparison of culturally defined *projects* ("socially constructed entity that embodies particular expectations"), and as a matter of personhood or identity. **Sources**: Carling, J., The role of aspirations in migration. Paper presented at the Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, Oxford, 2014; Carling, J. and Schewel, K., Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44:6, 945-963, 2018.

[6] Ability to migrate denotes whether prospective migrants can turn their migration aspirations into actual migration, given context-related obstacles and opportunities. **Sources**: Carling, J., The role of aspirations in migration. Paper presented at the Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, Oxford, 2014; Carling, J. and Schewel, K., Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44:6, 945-963, 2018.

[7] All answers are based on open-ended data collection tools with no prompts given during the interview process.

- **Expectations and aspirations to migrate**: The vast majority of respondents reportedly expected young men (approx. 18-30 years old) from the community to migrate (95/109). The majority of young men reportedly intended to migrate one day. Migration was considered the norm, as the most direct way out of poverty. Migration was expected of young men as a sign of social responsibility towards their family and for their own transition to adulthood.
- **Deciding to stay**: A majority of the respondents indicated that it would not be accepted if a young man decided to stay in his community. It would be better for a young man to attempt the journey and fail, rather than not trying at all. This indicates a strong social pressure towards all men to at least attempt migration, as they cannot bring prosperity to their family by staying. Migration was usually perceived as the most important way to bring prosperity to the family and the community more broadly, following the example of previous generations.

The impact of EU and EU member states' increasingly restrictive migration policies on migration dynamics in Kayes

- **Increase in irregular travel and stay in Europe**: Almost all respondents (106/107) reported that the journey to Europe has become more difficult compared to 20 years ago, with migration to Europe having become irregular for most individuals in the community. The majority of respondents also indicated a worsening of living conditions at destination in Europe (64/110), with all reported changes related to migrants' irregular status in Europe.
- **Perception of migration and intended destination unchanged:** Despite respondents' awareness that migration had become more difficult, all respondents reported that young men wanted to migrate anyway (110/110), as migration was still perceived as the most attractive means of earning money and finding a place in the community (60/108). While a bit less than half of respondents conceded that staying could be an option for young men, all perceived it as a 'poor, inferior' alternative to migration among the youth (48/108). More restrictive European migration policies have not led to a change in the destination of choice, with the EU remaining by far the preferred destination (92/98).
- **Heightened challenges but increased contributions**: While the majority of respondents perceived both the journey and life in Europe as more difficult compared to 20 years ago, the majority also felt that migrants nowadays contributed more to the community than they did in the past. This was reportedly because more individuals from the same household were abroad, compared to the past: while individual migrants' contributions may be small, due to frequently precarious working conditions in Europe, overall earnings of community members abroad added up to more than the earnings of previous generations. This contributed to the perception that migration remains the most attractive option for young adults in the community.

The role of information campaigns in shaping aspirations and migration decision-making in Kayes

- **High level of knowledge**: While only one third of respondents had been reached by an information campaign (33/110) about migration, the majority were reportedly already aware of the relevant information through other sources (22/30), such as news items on TV/ radio (40), social media (19), and returned migrants (8).
- **Impact on decision-making limited**: A slight majority of respondents who had been exposed to information campaigns reported that these had not impacted their perception or decision-making related to migration (23/32). Those who did feel their perception had become more nuanced (9/32) qualified their impression by stating that, although they felt better informed, this knowledge did not change anything for them in practice, as the irregular route was *de facto* the only route accessible to most aspiring migrants in the region. Information on legal pathways and opportunities in Mali was generally ignored, since it stood in stark contrast to respondents' own experiences with regards to limited opportunities in Mali and the (perceived) impossibility of successfully accessing legal pathways.
- **Migration as an opportunity, not a risk**: Respondents' high level of information regarding migration risks and the limited self-reported impact thereof on their decision to migrate illustrate how migration is not imagined in terms of threats and dangers, but rather as an opportunity, as a chance to escape poverty and become 'someone' in the community.

CONTENTS

List of acronyms

CMR	Central Mediterranean Sea Route
DFID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GMDAC	Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (IOM)
II	Individual Interview
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KI	Key Informant
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WMR	Western Mediterranean Route

Geographical classifications

Region	Highest form of governance below the national level

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INTRODUCTION

Mali is often seen as both a country of origin and transit for migrants[8] in the West African region. The country has a long history of migration due to existing social structures, cultural practices, environmental challenges, policy changes and/or armed conflict.[9] The Kayes region, situated at the western-most corner of the country, neighbouring Senegal and Mauritania, is particularly known for migration patterns both within Africa and to France, some of which date back to the beginning of France's colonial rule in the late 1800s. The impact migration has had on the region and its inhabitants is pervasive: entire villages are built with remittances sent by Kayesien migrants in France, returnees are deeply ingrained in local government structures and diaspora communities in France are treated as key agents for development by local and international actors alike.[10] Besides its impact on an economic level, migration has intensely shaped the local imaginary of success. Researchers speak of a 'culture of migration' in the region, a context in which migration has become so closely intertwined with an individual (man)'s position and recognition in the community that (international) migration is seen as a rite of passage from youth to adulthood and thereby, inherently linked with 'making it' as an adult in society.[11] In 2007, it was estimated that 80% of Malians in France originated from the region of Kayes.[12]

Since the 1980s and, more recently, since the 2000s, the ease with which individuals from Kayes can migrate and the role migration plays in the community have changed. First, legal migration to France and the European Union (EU) more broadly has become difficult, due to the increasingly restrictive nature of entry and permit of stay policies for Malian nationals. Second, as a result of insecurity in the Sahel region since the 2010s (including Northern Mali) and in parts of North Africa, notably Libya, previously attractive labour destinations in the region have become increasingly inaccessible. In parallel, and more recently, Malian nationals have increasingly started to reach the EU irregularly via the perilous Mediterranean Sea journey. As of October 2019, Malians were among the top five most numerous nationalities of arrivals along the Western Mediterranean Sea route reaching Spain and the third most numerous, after Guinea Conakry and Cote d'Ivoire, among West African nationalities across all three Mediterranean Sea routes reaching the EU that same year.[13]

In this context, several recent studies on the role of information campaigns in shaping decision-making regarding international migration have found that West African migrants who migrate irregularly to Europe do not feel dissuaded by information about the difficulties and risks of the journey.[14] A study conducted by REACH in collaboration with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) on the role of the diaspora in Italy in shaping migration decision-making along the Central Mediterranean Sea route (CMR) in June 2019 confirmed this finding for Malian nationals: even advice on risks and realities of life in Europe given directly by diaspora members in Europe to Malians at home was found to be ignored by Malian respondents in Italy and, reportedly, likely to be disregarded by prospective migrants.[15]

Funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and conducted in collaboration with the MMC, the aim of this study was to explore (1) the extent to which the 'culture of migration'[16] still contributes to migration aspirations in Kayes; (2) how changes in migration policies in the EU and shifts in the security context have

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[8] For the purposes of this assessment, the term 'migrant' is used for all people on the move, including both regional and international migration, unless a distinction is otherwise made.
[9] See, for example: IOM, Mali crisis: a migration perspective, June 2013; Findley, Does drought increase migration? A study of migration from rural Mali during the 1983-1985 drought, 1994.
[10] See, for instance, Daum, C., Migration, retour, non-retour et changement social dans le pays d'origine, 2005.
[11] Jonsson, Migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke village, 2008.
[12] Cambrezy, M., Le Codéveloppement : de la pratique à la politique, 2007.
[13] Source: UNHCR, Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 (Mediterranean), October 2019. According to a review of data on irregular arrivals to Italy and residence permits issued to nationals of selected countries in Northern and Western Africa in the EU conducted by IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Center (GMDAC), between 2011 and 2017 more Malians reached Europe irregularly via sea than receiving residence permits on the continent, only one of three nationalities among ten reviewed for whom this was found to be the case. See GMDAC, African migration to the EU: Irregular migration in context, 2019.
[14] OHCHR, Policy Brief: Migration risk campaigns are based on wrong assumptions, May 2015.
[15] REACH/MMC, Outspoken but unheard: How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route, October 2019.
[16] For a full definition of the term, please consult the methodology section of this report.

impacted (2-1) migration aspirations[17] and ability[18] to migrate on the part of prospective migrants in Kayes and (2-2) migration decision-making, including choice of destination and *mode* of migration. A third aim of the study was to explore the appropriateness and effectiveness of information campaigns in this context.

The report consists of three sections. The first part explains the methodology and analytical framework employed and presents both demographic and socio-economic profiles of individuals interviewed. The second part presents the key findings of the study, in line with the three research questions. The final part is the report's conclusion, highlighting main take-aways emerging from the study.

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[17] The term 'migration aspirations' refers to a general preference for migration, following the conviction that leaving would be better than staying. A preference to migrate is only one possibility in which to channel the desire for change which is produced by conditions (or root causes), prospects for improvement, and life aspirations. Migration aspirations undergo several interlinked conceptualisations: they can be understood as a comparison of *places*, as a comparison of culturally defined *projects* ("socially constructed entity that embodies particular expectations"), and as a matter of personhood or identity. **Sources**: Carling, J., The role of aspirations in migration. Paper presented at the Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, Oxford, 2014; Carling, J. and Schewel, K., Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44:6, 945-963, 2018.

[18] Ability to migrate denotes whether prospective migrants can turn their migration aspirations into actual migration, given context-related obstacles and opportunities. **Sources**: Carling, J., The role of aspirations in migration. Paper presented at the Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, Oxford, 2014; Carling, J. and Schewel, K., Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44:6, 945-963, 2018.

METHODOLOGY

The present section outlines the methodology that was used to carry out this study. It starts with an overview of the analytical framework applied, definitions and overall framing of the research questions. Then, it proceeds with a detailed overview of the assessment's methodology, including an overview of secondary and primary data collection methods and potential limitations. It closes with a section on the profiles of respondents, with detailed information on demographic and socio-economic profiles to guide the reading and interpretation of the findings in the following chapter.

Analytical framework

Analytical approach

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. To what extent does the so-called 'culture of migration' still contribute to migration aspirations in Kayes, Mali?
2. To what extent have external factors, such as the EU and EU member states' increasingly restrictive migration policies in the past twenty years, impacted and shaped
   a. migration aspirations and ability to migrate, and
   b. migration decision-making, including choice of destination and *mode* of migration, within the assessed communities?
3. What role does information on migration and its risks, shared through information campaigns, play during the decision-making process?
4. How do the above differ between individuals from households with and without a household member currently abroad?[19]

In line with the research questions outlined, the following definitions and theoretical concepts lay the foundation for the design and analysis of the study.

Defining 'culture of migration'

Research on the drivers of migration has traditionally been inspired by the neo-classical economics approach, in which people are conceptualised as rational actors who make rational choices based on a cost-benefit analysis of migrating versus staying in their country of origin.[20] However, as migration scholars have pointed out in recent years, *'migration does not take place in a social, cultural, political, and institutional void'*.[21] As such, more recent scholarship has started to highlight the importance of the structures in which migration occurs, stressing the role of social networks and wider processes of social, cultural and global change in shaping migration.

One of the more recently developed concepts in the analysis of socio-cultural drivers of migration in particular has been the notion of 'culture of migration'. According to Kandel and Massey,[22] there are communities where international movement has become the norm and staying the exception. In such contexts, migration is deeply rooted in the everyday reality of the community, with young adults expecting – and being expected – to migrate abroad for some time. Not all destinations are of equal value. Frequently, specific locations are identified over time as the preferred destination for young adults in the community; other destinations would then be considered as 'lesser' and not constituting 'real' migration. In a community with a 'culture of migration' young males would see migration as part of their coming-of-age process, with the aspiration to migrate transmitted across generations.[23]

The concept of 'culture of migration' has faced some criticism. The first relates to its depiction of 'culture' as a static concept, even though culture should be considered an everyday reality which is formed and re-formed through

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[19] 'Abroad' was defined in this context as any country outside Mali.

[20] Massey, DS, Arango, J, Hugo, G, Kouaouci, A, Pellegrino, A & Taylor, JE (1998), *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium* (Oxford: Clarendon), p.8.

[21] De Haas, H., Migration and development: A theoretical perspective, International migration Institute (IMI), University of Oxford, Working Paper no. 9, 2008, p.6.

[22] Kandel, W. and D.S. Massey. *The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis*. Social Forces 80:981–1004, 2002.

[23] Ibid, p.981.

everyday practices. The second relates to the contexts to which the term is usually applied. In many instances, 'culture of migration' is exclusively used to describe places and people in the Global South, thereby essentialising and 'othering' the experiences of people outside the Global North. Acknowledging this critique, the current study still employs the term 'culture of migration' for the following two reasons: (1) it captures well the extent to which migration permeates the reality of everyday life of people in the region of Kayes, our population of interest; and (2) it is a term that is more familiar to parts of the report's audience, namely policy and development circles, than the term 'socio-cultural drivers' would be. Further, in the case of the Soninke in Kayes in particular, both the Soninke and other Malians refer to the Soninke as the '*ethnie migratoire par excellence*'.[24]

Unpacking migration aspirations

This study did not aim to unpack the diversity of migration drivers in the region of Kayes. Rather, it aimed to explore the extent to which the culture of migration among the Soninke, a phenomenon well documented in the region from the 1980s to the 2000s, still shapes migration aspirations 20 years later, and how such aspirations interplay with 'opportunity structures' in the region in terms of migration, notably increasingly restrictive EU migration policies for Malian nationals.

For the purpose of this study, the term 'aspiration to migrate' refers to a general preference for migration, following the conviction that leaving would be better than staying.[25] As Carling and Schewel write:

> *A preference to migrate is only one possibility in which to channel the desire for change which is produced by conditions (or root causes), prospects for improvement, and life aspirations. Migration aspirations undergo several interlinked conceptualisations: they can be understood as a comparison of places, as a comparison of culturally defined projects ('socially constructed entity that embodies particular expectations'), and as a matter of personhood or identity.[26]*

The actual migration decision-making process unfolds as aspirations are weighed against the concrete ability to migrate, which must account for factors that constrain or facilitate movement. These may be external factors, such as restrictive migration policies, or personal factors, such as access to resources. In this context, the concept of '*involuntary immobility*' may come into play. This refers to a situation in which an individual aspires to migrate, but is unable to do so due to economic, political, policy-level, or other obstacles.[27]

Methodology overview

REACH adopted qualitative research methods to explore the culture of migration in the region of Kayes and the role of information campaigns therein. Data collection methods employed included 5 key informant interviews (KIIs), 110 individual interviews (IIs) and 6 focus group discussions (FGDs) with different population groups in 11 villages in the region of Kayes.

Geographical scope

The assessment covered the region of Kayes, in western Mali. Based on KIIs conducted during the inception of the study, 11 villages were purposively selected, as they were identified as communities with a historical culture of migration.

[24] Source: key informant interview, Kayes, October 2019. English translation: 'Ethnic group on the move *par excellence*.'
[25] Carling, J., The role of aspirations in migration. Paper presented at the Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, Oxford, 2014; Carling, J. and Schewel, K., Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44:6, 945-963, 2018.
[26] Carling, J. and Schewel, K., Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44:6, 945-963, 2018, p.953.
[27] Carling, J. 2002. "Migration in the age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 28 (1): 5–42.

Map 1: Data collection locations in Kayes, by number of respondents
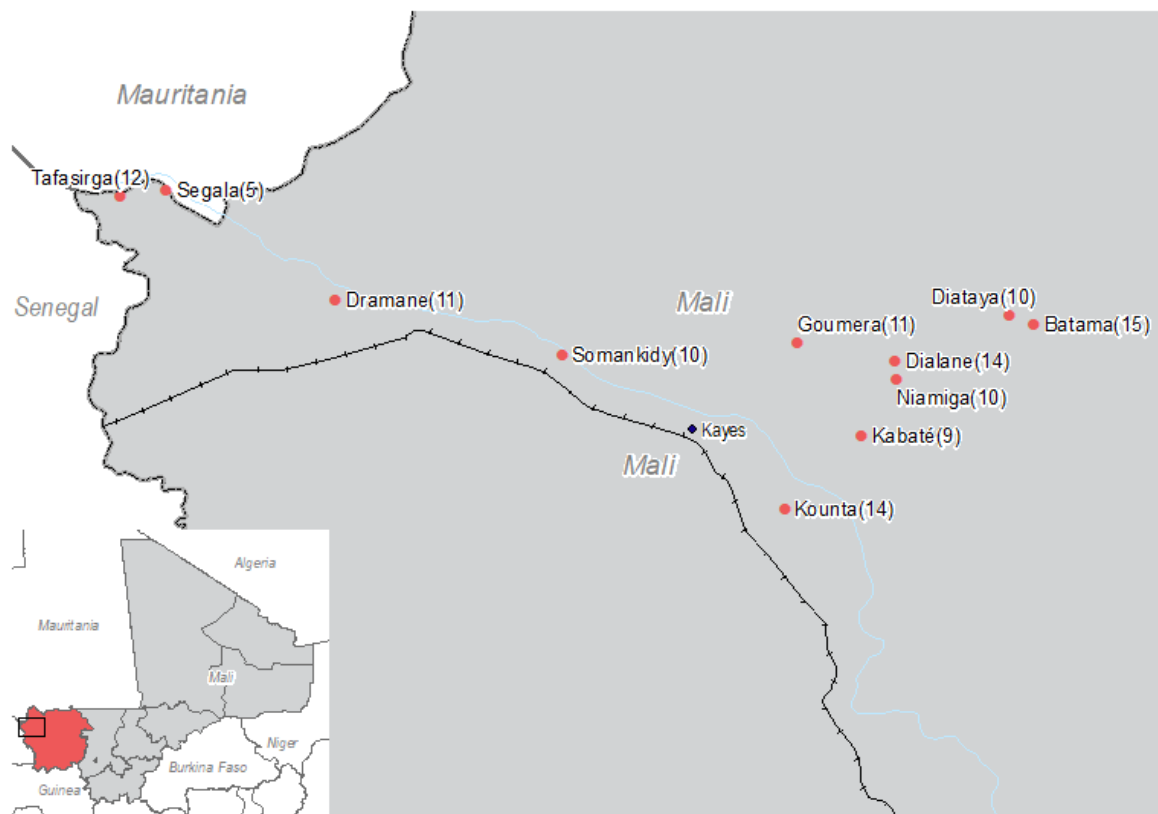
Population of interest and sampling strategy

The population of interest are individuals in the region of Kayes, originating from villages which, based on KIIs, have traditionally been marked by a strong culture of migration. Respondents were sampled purposively on the basis of their belonging to one of the following groups:

- Community leaders;
- Prospective migrants, defined as 'young adults aged 18 to 30 years old' originating from the community;
- Other community members.

Further, the population of interest was disaggregated on the basis of whether or not respondents had one or several household members residing outside of Mali for a minimum of five years. This disaggregation was chosen as, according to secondary literature:

- The perception of migration and immobility may differ based on whether respondents have household members abroad;
- How individuals relate to information campaigns may be different depending on the presence or lack of close links with individuals in the discussed destination.[28]

Data collection methods

The research is based on both secondary and primary data collection methods. During the first phase of the study, a thorough secondary data review was conducted, which was substantiated with preliminary discussions with actors knowledgeable about the context based in Bamako and, in a minority of cases, contacted remotely. Primary data collection took place between 13 October and 3 November 2019 in 11 villages in the region of Kayes. Qualitative data collection methods employed included IIs, KIIs and FGDs with the population of interest.

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[28] See REACH/MMC, Outspoken but unheard: How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route, October 2019.

Secondary data review

The secondary data review informed the research design, including the definition of the research scope, research questions and the development of the data collection tools. The questionnaires were developed based on previous research and migration theory's concepts of the '*culture of migration*' and '*involuntary immobility*'. Furthermore, secondary data sources were used to triangulate the primary data collected. The main sources of secondary data were (1) research by migration scholar Jonsson on migration aspirations, the culture of migration and immobility in Kayes in 2005,[29] (2) migration scholar Carling's work on involuntary immobility[30] and (3) a study conducted by REACH in collaboration with the MMC on the role of the Malian diaspora in Europe in shaping migration decision-making along the CMR, from October 2019.[31]

Primary data collection

Primary data collection took place between 13 October and 3 November 2019 through a team of one assessment officer, one field manager and four enumerators, all of whom originated from the region of Kayes.[32] Findings are based on reporting of 145 respondents, of whom 110 were interviewed through in-person, open-ended, in-depth interviews; 30 were interviewed through FGDs and 5 through KIIs.

Table 1: Primary data collection tools, by # of respondents

Respondents	Data collection tool		
	KII	FGD	II
1. Community leaders	5	-	-
2. Community members	-	10	30
1.1 Respondent with HH member abroad	-	-	15
1.2 Respondent without HH member abroad	-	-	15
1.3 Community elders (51 years+)	-	10	0
3. Prospective migrants	-	20	80
3.1. Respondent with HH member abroad	-	-	40
3.2. Respondent without HH member abroad	-	-	40
Tot # respondents	145		

A total of six FGDs were conducted to further explore differing views based on age and gender. The following disaggregation was adopted:

Table 2: FGD disaggregation and # of respondents

	# respondents/ FGD	# FGDs	Tot # of respondents
Community elders	5	2	10
Prospective migrants (men)	5	2	10
Prospective migrants (women)	5	2	10

As secondary data suggested that views on migration were likely different between men and women, particular efforts were made to reach out to female respondents. In total, 34 women were interviewed, of whom 24 were reached through IIs and 10 through FGDs.

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[29] Jonsson, G., 'The Mirage of migration: migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke Village', *Band 466 von Specialerække (Institut for Antropologi)*, 2007; Migration Aspirations and Immobility in a Malian Soninke Village, IMI Working Paper Series no. 10, 2008; (2012) 'Migration, identity and immobility in a Malian Soninke Village.' In: Graw, Knut and Schielke, Samuli, (eds.), *The Global Horizon: Migratory Expectations in Africa and the Middle East.* Belgium: Leuven University Press.

[30] Carling, J. 2002. "Migration in the age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 28 (1): 5–42

[31] REACH/MMC, Outspoken but unheard: How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route, October 2019.

[32] One out of four enumerators was a woman who focused on interviewing female respondents.

Preliminary discussions with actors knowledgeable about migration in Kayes, such as migration researchers, civil society members, (international) non-governmental organisations (I)NGOs and international organisations (IOs) were conducted to fine-tune the research focus, guide the selection of the population of interest, data collection sites, and other relevant information to inform research design. Data was recorded manually in respondents' mother tongue, transcribed on a computer and translated into French. All staff involved in data collection activities were appropriately trained in the delivery of tools and the questionnaire was duly piloted. Inconsistencies in transcription were clarified during debrief sessions with data collectors and adequately cleaned before the coding process.

Analysis

Primary data collected was coded with the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.Ti. To explore differences between population groups, findings were disaggregated as follows: (1) community members and prospective migrants, (2) respondents with and without household members abroad; (3) community elders and younger respondents; (4) male and female respondents; (5) differing ethnic groups. In the cases where differences between any of these groups were identified, this has been highlighted in the relevant report section.

Ethics procedures

Data collection activities adopted a 'Do No Harm' approach to avoid causing any harm or injury to assessment participants. The assessment adhered to the following guiding principles to ensure that data collection was ethically sound:
• **Informed consent**: this study was conducted with participants aged 18 years or above only. Respondents gave their oral informed consent to take part in the assessment and participated in interviews on a voluntary basis.
• **Confidentiality**: this study ensured that the confidentiality of the information provided by respondents was respected. All personal information in datasets was made anonymous and excluded from the final report.
• **Ethics in data collection**: the research design and development of data collection tools took into account the sensitivity of the issues discussed. In this view, REACH data collectors received a dedicated training on conducting data collection with vulnerable groups, identifying signs of distress and managing sensitive data collection situations.

Limitations

- As this assessment employed qualitative research methods, results are indicative only and cannot be generalised for the entire population of Kayes.
- While particular efforts were made to include women's views, they still represented a lower share of the overall number of respondents (34 out of 145).
- Not all respondents responded to all questions and not all questions were applicable to all population groups interviewed. As such, relevant sub-sets of the overall sample are specified for each finding.
- During the research design stage, it was envisaged to include in the sampling migrants in transit, reached out to remotely via phone. During the data collection, however, it proved unfeasible to reach this population group for two main reasons: (1) respondents in the villages were generally reluctant to share the contact details of relatives abroad with field teams, and (2) even in cases where respondents shared contact details, migrants currently abroad were difficult to reach and, when reached, reluctant to participate to the study remotely over the phone. To compensate, the number of interviews with prospective migrants interviewed in the villages was increased.

Respondents' profiles

Respondents were sampled purposively in 11 villages in the region of Kayes, which, based on KIIs, have traditionally been marked by a strong culture of migration. Among the two types of respondents, community members (including community leaders) and prospective migrants, respondents were further sampled purposively on the basis of having a household member abroad (please see the section 'primary data collection' for further detail). In this overview, respondents' profiles are presented in an aggregated format, except in cases where notable differences were found in the profiles of the different population groups.

Personal profile

Age, gender, ethnic affiliation

The vast majority of respondents belong to the Soninke ethnic group and were male. Age groups mirrored the purposive sampling strategy employed, whereby prospective migrants were all aged 18 to 30 years old, while community members tended to be between 31 and 60 years old. Community leaders were the oldest respondents, mirroring their position of seniority in the community.

Figure 1: Gender of respondents[33]
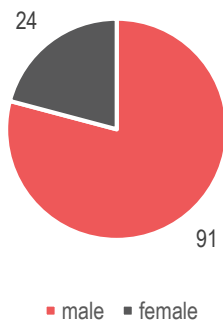
Figure 2: Ethnic affiliation of respondents[34]

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[33] Figures cited reflect number of respondents, not percentages.
[34] Ibid, throughout.

Figure 3: Respondents' age, by age groups
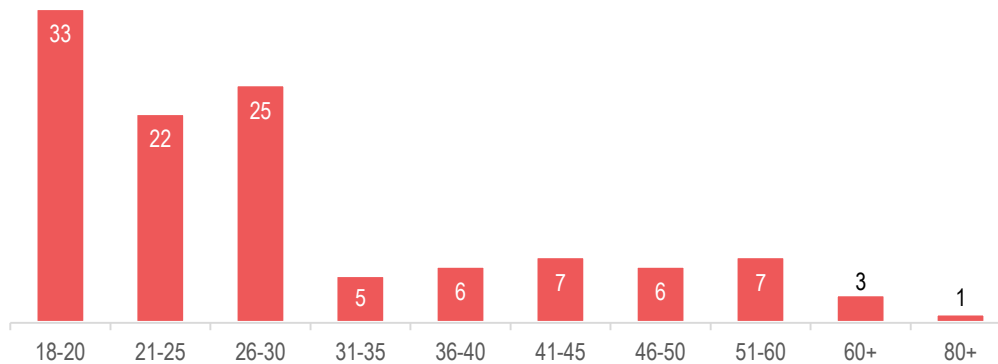
Level of education

The level of education of respondents was low. Forty-one respondents reported not having any form of education and a further 21 reported to have attended religious schooling only (madrasa). Slightly more than one third of respondents (46 out of 115) had attended primary school, with a comparatively low seven individuals reporting to have attended secondary school.

Figure 4: Highest level of schooling attended
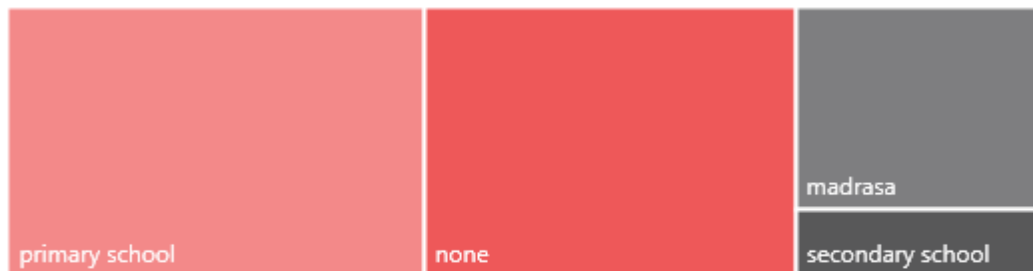
The level of education of respondents with household members abroad tended to be slightly higher compared to respondents without household members abroad. Among respondents with household members abroad, 32 out of 55 had attended either primary or secondary school, compared to 20 out of 55 among respondents without household members abroad. This difference was particularly pronounced among prospective migrants, where three out of four respondents who had a household member abroad had received primary education at least, compared to one in two among respondents without household members abroad.

Figure 5: Level of education, by respondents with and without household members abroad

- ■ Respondent with household members abroad
- ■ Respondent without household members abroad
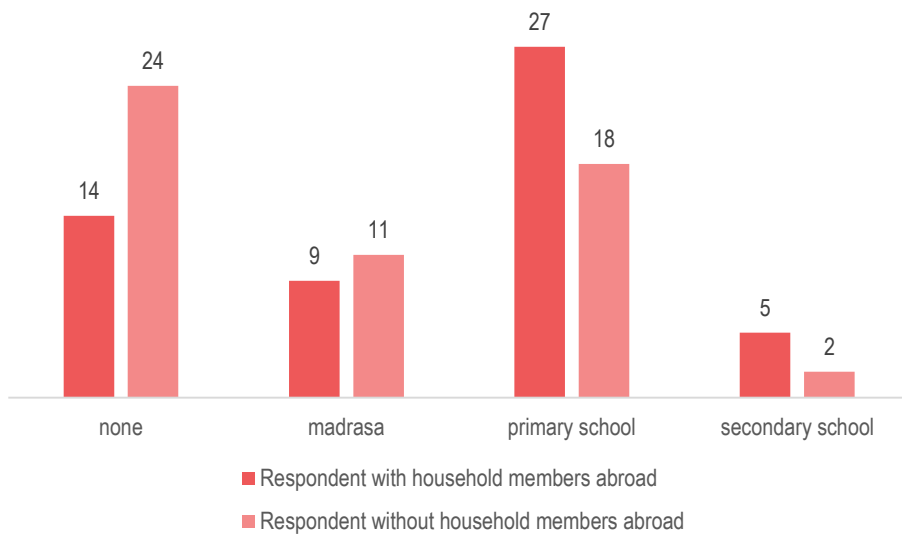
Socio-economic profile

All but one respondent worked in low-skilled jobs, with the relative majority working as farmers or handymen (51 and 15 respectively, out of 110). All women reported working as housewives (23). All respondents who reported being students or having no profession were young adult men (23, 11 and 7 respectively).

Figure 6: Respondents' occupation
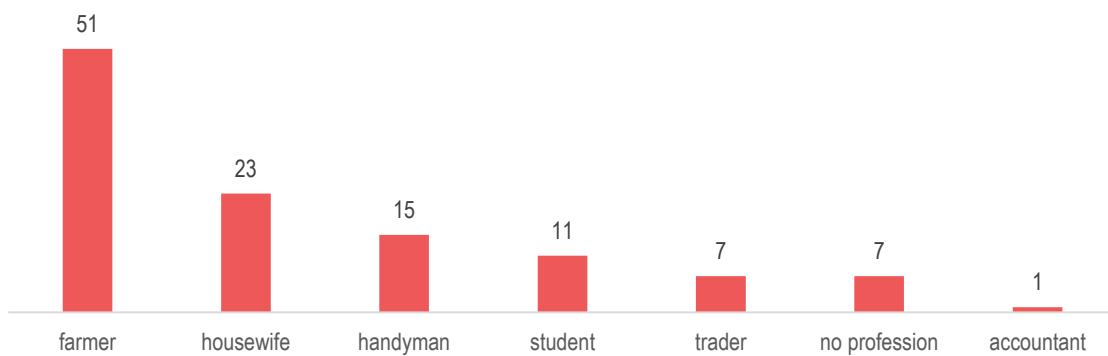
Migration history in the household

One of the sampling criteria was whether respondents had household members abroad, to determine to what extent the perception of migration and role of information campaigns changed among respondents who had or did not have household members abroad. Among respondents with a household member abroad, the majority had more than one member abroad (35 out of 55). Among those, two thirds had between 2 and 5 household members abroad, while another 9 reported having between 6 and 10 household members abroad. All household members abroad were men.

Figure 7: Number of household members abroad among respondents with household members abroad
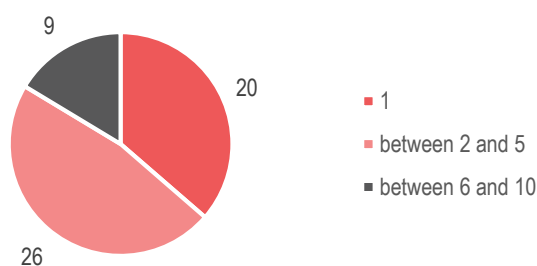
The majority of household members abroad were in Europe (36 out of 55). Of them, all respondents had at least one household member in France specifically. Twelve respondents reportedly had household members in both the EU and African countries and the remaining 7 individuals had household members in African countries (Central, West and North Africa) only. This mirrors the history of migration among the Soninke in Kayes, which has traditionally been directed towards France (*see history section for further details*). Household members' length of stay abroad differed widely, with respondents reporting having household members abroad for as long as 20 years to less than five years. Respondents who had a household member who had been abroad for less than five years tended to have other household members who had stayed abroad for longer.

Situation of respondents' household member(s) abroad

When asked, the majority of respondents did not know the profession their household members held abroad (29 out of 47). This hints at the selectivity with which information is shared in a context where respondents reported being in regular contact with their relatives abroad.[35] Among those who were aware, the most cited professions were daily worker (13 out of 18) and working in trade, retail or restaurants (5 out of 18). The vast majority of respondents reported that their household members abroad sent money home (52 out of 55). The majority of them did so regularly, once a month or every other month (44 out of 52).[36] Of those who reportedly received money regularly, the majority received this from more than one household member. This illustrates how one household in the community of origin is often supported by several migrants abroad.

With regards to household members' legal status abroad, answers were mixed: around one third reported that some household members abroad held regular status while others were there irregularly (18 out of 48). In one third of cases, all household members held regular status (17 out of 48). A minority (10 out of 48) reported that all their household members were abroad irregularly abroad.[37]

In terms of the route taken to Europe, the majority of respondents had household members that had travelled irregularly (28 out of 45); either in all cases (12/28) or in some cases (16/28). A single household could have family members abroad both in a regular and in an irregular situation, and some of these family members could have travelled regularly while others did so irregularly. This illustrates that even individuals with family already at the destination travel irregularly, despite their social networks in Europe.

Migration attempts among respondents without household members abroad

Among respondents without household members abroad, almost half had a member in the household who had attempted to migrate in the past, but who had not reached their intended destination (26 out of 59). Those who had attempted the journey were all men, with their primary destinations being North Africa (Algeria and Libya), West Africa and, for one respondent, Europe. This illustrates that also among households without historic patterns of migration in the household, migration seemed an attractive opportunity, which was frequently attempted, though the destination was often not Europe.

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[35] On the selectivity of information sharing between Malians in the country of origin and diaspora members in Europe, please consult: REACH/MMC, Outspoken but unheard: How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route, October 2019.

[36] Among the remaining, three reported receiving money when they requested it, two 'often' and one reported not receiving any money. Two respondents did not answer to this question.

[37] Three respondents did not know.

FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the study's main findings and is comprised of:

- *An overview of the historical and recent context of migration dynamics in the region of Kayes, Mali;*
- *Key findings on the extent to which the culture of migration still shapes the perception of migration in Kayes, including its role in shaping migration aspirations;*
- *Key findings on the impact of increasingly restrictive EU migration policies on migration dynamics in Kayes;*
- *Key findings on the role of information campaigns in shaping migration aspirations in Kayes.*

Historical and recent context of migration dynamics in Kayes

This sub-section of the report aims to present a concise overview of the migration context in the region of Kayes by providing a historical overview of key migration trends in the region since the late 1700s. Given most of the villages included in the study were of majority Soninke and the phenomenon of migration in Kayes is particularly widespread among the Soninke, the below history focuses on their history in particular.

History of migration in Kayes

17th - 18th century: pre-colonial times

The region of Kayes, located by the Senegal River near the south-western border of the Sahara Desert, has traditionally been home to the Soninke people. An ethnic group engaged in commerce between the Sahara and the south, the Soninke played an important role in pre-colonial West African trade and were among the first itinerant traders (*dyula*) in West Africa.[38,39] According to Manchuelle, power in pre-colonial Soninke society was based on wealth and clientage,[40] both of which were traditionally attained through migration: trade necessitated circular migration between the North and the more fertile South, as did agricultural production, for which Soninke farmers engaged in seasonal migration.[41] As a result, since the early 17th century, migration became associated with wealth and power in Soninke society.

At the end of the 18th century, traders from Europe, especially from France, came to participate in the regional West African commerce. Members of the Soninke aristocracy began working as indigenous sailors (*laptots*) on French ships.[42] Soon after, in the mid-19th century, the Soninke started to engage in seasonal labour migration to peanut plantations in Gambia and later Senegal. This migration, the *navetanat,* was to become one of the most important migration flows in the modern history of West Africa.[43] According to custom, the wealth accumulated by the young adult abroad was to be returned to the head of the family in full, to support the family and (thereby indirectly) secure the position of the young man as future patriarch of the family.[44] This cemented the role of migration in a young Soninke man's life, as a means to assure their position in family and society.

19th century to early 20th century: colonial times[45]

In 1892, the French colonised 'French Sudan', which is now known as 'Mali'. According to some authors, colonial domination increased regional labour migration, due to the tax the French imposed on the territory.[46] However, the extent of the tax's impact on increasing migration in the region remains contested among academics.[47] At the same

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[38] Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press, p.13, retrieved from Jonsson, G., 'The Mirage of migration: migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke Village', *Band 466 von Specialerække (Institut for Antropologi)*, 2007.

[39] This section is closely based on: Jonsson, G., 'The Mirage of migration: migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke Village', *Band 466 von Specialerække (Institut for Antropologi)*, 2007.

[40] Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press, p.82.

[41] Pollet, E. & Winter, G. 1971. *La Société Soninké*. Brussels: Editions de l'Institut de Sociologie, Université Libre de Bruxelles, p.116.

[42] Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press.

[43] Ibid., p.53.

[44] Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press, p.58-59.

[45] The colony of French Sudan, which included what is today Mali, was established in 1892.

[46] Kane, Francine & Lericollais, André. 1975. "L'Émigration en Pays Soninké". *Cahiers ORSTOM* 12(2): pp. 177-187. Kane and Lericollais argue that the colonial tax introduced required individuals to migrate to acquire sufficient funds to pay the taxes due and sustain their families.

[47] See: Jonsson, G., 'The Mirage of migration: migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke Village', *Band 466 von Specialerække (Institut for Antropologi)*, 2007; Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press.

time, with the abolition of slavery in the early twentieth century, former slaves became increasingly involved in temporary migration as *navetans* and later applied for military recruitment in French West Africa, joining the young males of the Soninke nobility. According to several authors, migration then became a declaration of independence, not only for former slaves, but for young males more broadly, who, through migration, secured their own source of income.[48]

With the completion of the Dakar-Bamako railway in 1923, the marginalisation of the economy of the Soninke homeland became apparent, as the economic centre of the region moved increasingly away from the region of Kayes.[49] In the 1930s, Soninke migration moved increasingly from rural-rural to rural-urban, covering a wider geographical area, from Mali and Senegal to the Ivory Coast, the two Congos, and the ports of France. Former Soninke *laptots* were hired by French employers as sailors on international shipping lines and, around 1930, many of these sailors started obtaining employment in the French port of Marseille, building some of the first Soninke migrant communities in France.

1950s to 1960s: post-World War II

After the Second World War, as part of France's post-war reconstruction efforts, the French started to actively encourage labour migration from Kayes to France. At the time, the French public was reportedly against foreign immigration. However, after 1946 (former) colonial subjects were considered French citizens by the French government, making them a welcome labour force in a country in much need of manual labour.[50] In 1960, this migration flow was further spurred by the economic decline of the Soninke homeland,[51] and the continued need for manual labour in France. According to Manchuelle, the acute labour shortage in France resulted in a complete breakdown of official immigration control, and French enterprises ran their own recruitments abroad.[52]

Soninke workers in France started to become more involved in the recruitment of their relatives from Kayes to join them in France. Settled migrants organised the arrival, housing and employment of new Soninke migrant workers and facilitated their contact with French employers. According to Kane and Lericollais, this intra-ethnic support system held particular advantages for French employers, as they were left with fewer social obligations than with French labourers.[53] As a result of efficient Soninke migrant networks and French employers' preference for their recruitment, the Soninke constituted 85% of sub-Saharan immigrants in France in 1968.[54]

It is estimated that, by 1975, about one third of the active male population in the Soninke homeland had migrated to France.[55] At the time, most migration was done by heads of households, middle-aged men, who had families at home and returned to their villages of origin on a regular basis, between every two to five years. According to one community leader KI from Kayes, migrants paid the equivalent of 38 Euros per trip.

1970s- 1980s: droughts & initial clampdown

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the Soninke homeland faced several severe droughts, notably in the periods 1969-1974 and 1983-1985. Authors converge around the conclusion that droughts in the region were not triggering increased migration to France.[56] However, the ever more unpredictable climate in the region increased households' reliance on migration as an alternative livelihood source to agriculture, traditionally the primary livelihood in the

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[48] Manchuelle, F. 1989. "Slavery, Emancipation and Labour Migration in West Africa: The Case of the Soninke". *Journal of African History*, 30: pp. 89-106; Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press; Pollet, E. & Winter, G. 1971. *La Société Soninké*. Brussels: Editions de l'Institut de Sociologie, Université Libre de Bruxelles.

[49] Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press, p.179-180.

[50] Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press, p.213.

[51] According to Jonsson, 2007: '*The Soninke in Mali did not benefit economically after the country's political independence from France in 1960. Their homeland was far from the new urban metropoles and they were marginalised from the administration and enterprises in the West African capitals. Moreover, in 1960, the break-up of the Malian federation (which included the present Senegal and Mali) hindered the movement of the navetans towards Senegal and so Soninke migrants increasingly turned to France as their principal destination*.' Source: Jonsson, G., 'The Mirage of migration: migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke Village', *Band 466 von Specialerække (Institut for Antropologi)*, 2007; see also: Kane, F. & Lericollais, A. 1975. "L'Émigration en Pays Soninké". *Cahiers ORSTOM* 12(2).

[52] Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press, p.217.

[53] Kane, F. & Lericollais, A. 1975. "L'Émigration en Pays Soninké". *Cahiers ORSTOM* 12(2), p.183.

[54] Manchuelle, F. 1997. *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labour Diasporas 1848-1960*. USA: Ohio University Press, p.2.

[55] Kane, F. & Lericollais, A. 1975. "L'Émigration en Pays Soninké". *Cahiers ORSTOM* 12(2), p.177.

[56] Findley has pointed out that migration to France probably declined during drought: Spontaneous famine and drought-related migration from the Sahel borders is not directed to international destinations like France, since such a move is expensive and requires planning. Findley, S. 1994. "Does Drought Increase Migration? A Study of Migration from Rural Mali during the 1983-1985 Drought." *International Migration Review*, 28(3): pp. 539-553.

region. According to Findley, since the 1980s, the typical Soninke household has not been able to grow enough food to support itself.[57] Migration became not just a means of earning a profit, but a survival strategy.

In 1974 the French government took measures to stop the arrival of new foreign workers, reportedly as a result of increasing anti-immigrant sentiment among the French public. Circular migration between France and Mali became more difficult, as residence permits were introduced and the amount of time a Malian national could stay outside of France without losing his French residency was restricted. The restrictions undermined the migrant networks that had been built over the years, lengthening the time Malians stayed in France without seeing their families, as well as limiting the previously established system whereby young adults in the family were replacing older migrants in France every few years. As circular migration for men working in France became more difficult, families started to leave Kayes to join their working male relatives in France, making long-term return less likely.[58] According to Quiminal, irregular arrivals increased in this period. In 1976, the French State started to introduce repatriation programmes for Malians who were irregularly in France, which included an allowance and income generation trainings for those who returned voluntarily.[59]

1990s – 2000s

Since the 1990s, migration from Mali to France, and to the EU more broadly, has become increasingly restricted. Restrictions implemented have included: enhanced requirements for visa applications to the continent, more stringent rules to remain in France and the EU with a regular status, as well as an increased crackdown on irregular stay, including forced returns from the EU to Mali.[60] According to one source, a rise in more selective immigration policies (to France and the EU) disproportionally affected the Soninke in Kayes as they traditionally engaged in so-called 'low-skilled' migration to the continent, hence were one of the first groups to be barred from legal entry.[61]

More restrictive regulations made legal entry and stay more difficult. However, the extent to which this curbed migration from Mali and the region of Kayes remains contested. In 2003, the French government estimated that of the 120,000 Malians in France that year, 60 percent had arrived irregularly.[62] The vast majority of them originated from Kayes and built on networks of compatriots in France dating from the 1950s. In 2007, it was estimated that 80 per cent of Malians in France originated from Kayes. At the same time, in 2005, two out of three households in Kayes were estimated to have a household member abroad, of whom the vast majority resided in France.[63] In addition to entering France irregularly by plane with forged papers, or overstaying short-term visas, in the 2000s, irregular migration on pirogue boats from Senegal to Spain became more common.

2010 onwards

According to an IOM GMDAC brief on African migration to the EU published in early 2019, between 2011 and 2017 Malians were one of only three (out of 10) West and North African nationalities in the EU for which irregular stays outweighed first time residence permits (used as a proxy for regular migration to the EU).[64] Irregular travels included plane travel with forged papers but also the lengthy and dangerous boat trips via the Mediterranean Sea. Malians increasingly started arriving to Europe via both the CMR and WMR in the 2010s. In Italy, Malian nationals started arriving via the CMR in 2011, coinciding with the first civil war in Libya, a previously attractive labour destination for sub-Saharan migrants across the continent.

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[57] Findley, S. 1994. "Does Drought Increase Migration? A Study of Migration from Rural Mali during the 1983-1985 Drought." *International Migration Review*, 28(3): pp. 539-553. See also: Whitehouse, Bruce. 2003. "Staying Soninke". Unpublished research paper in Anthropology, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.

[58] Chastanet, M. 1992. "Survival Strategies of a Sahelian Society: The Case of the Soninke in Senegal from the Middle of the Nineteenth Century to the Present". *Food and Foodways*, 5(2): pp.127-149, p.145; Quiminal, C. 1994. "The Changes in the French Migratory Policy and Their Consequences Upon West Africa". *The Journal of Social Studies*, 66(October): pp.59-74, p.65.

[59] Quiminal, C. 1994. "The Changes in the French Migratory Policy and Their Consequences Upon West Africa". *The Journal of Social Studies*, 66(October): pp.59-74.

[60] Mali participated in a consultation on migration with France in 2000 to promote cooperation, including circular migration schemes and diaspora engagement. It also took plart in a Framework Cooperation Agreement on Immigration Issues with Spain in 2008 to facilitate the readmission of Malian nationals, promote legal migration channels and visa facilitations, and support migration-management policies in Mali. **Sources**: Migration Policy Institute, Mali: Seeking Opportunity Abroad, 2004; Migration Policy Institute, EU Migration Partnerships: A Work in Progress, December 2017.

[61] Jonsson, G., 'The Mirage of migration: migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke Village', *Band 466 von Specialerække (Institut for Antropologi)*, 2007.

[62] Migration Policy Institute, Mali: Seeking Opportunity Abroad, 2004.

[63] Cambrezy, M., Le Codéveloppement : de la pratique à la politique, 2007; CADEKAS, Répertoire des associations de la région de Kayes en France, 2007.

[64] GMDAC, African migration to the EU: Irregular migration in context, 2019.

The Soninke from Kayes remain among the most represented groups among Malians in the EU. Building on long-established migration networks, the conditions in which they currently find themselves in France are very different to the experiences of the generations before them. More limited access to a regular migration status means that many live in precarious conditions in the destination country, unable to continue historically established circular migration patterns. They tend to work in the informal economy, frequently in exploitative conditions. Some authors argue that, as a result of increasingly restrictive migration policies to France, '*the migratory system of the Soninke has been largely disrupted and migration to France has changed from a viable livelihood strategy into a clandestine business*'.[65]

Following the so-called 'migration crisis' in 2015, when one million refugees and migrants reached Europe irregularly via the sea, mostly via the Eastern Mediterranean Route, the EU and its member states have stepped up their cooperation with third countries and countries of origin, including in West Africa. While Mali had been identified as a priority partner in the region, observers noted that the Malian government has been more hesitant than others in cooperating with the EU, especially in supporting returns of Malian nationals from the EU to Mali.[66] According to some, this is related to the pivotal role of migration and remittances in Mali, and the corresponding unpopular nature of policies which evidently aim at restricting migration.

Box 1: The role of migration in the region of Kayes today

The impact of migration is pervasive in Kayes, with the benefits of migration visible on every corner. Kayes is acknowledged as one of the wealthiest regions of Mali, a fact largely attributed to the investments migrants make in the community. Many studies have attempted to analyse the developmental impact of migrants' remittances in Kayes, as large amounts of remittances go into raising the local living standards and building local infrastructure, including roads, schools, healthcare centres, water tanks and electricity networks. According to one study, the number of healthcare centres quadrupled between 1980 and 1995, with schools in almost every village in 2005, compared to their rarity in the late 1980s, all thanks to the diaspora in France.

Several actors have pointed out that migrants act as de-facto substitutes for the state, in a region where, for a long time, the state was absent. Their unique role in the local community has been acknowledged by the government itself, which builds on partnerships with established diaspora organisations to strengthen its legitimacy in the region. Likewise, development organisations, national or international, frequently collaborate with diaspora organisations, to support their programmes and ensure buy-in and trust from local communities.

Sources: Daum, C. 1995. "Les migrants, partenaires de la coopération internationale : Le cas des Maliens en France". *Document technique no.107, réalisé dans le cadre de programme du recherche "Migrations internationales et développement"*; Gubert, F. 1999. "La participation des maliens de France au developpement de la region de Kayes" in: Bocquier, P. & Diarra, T. (eds). *Population et Societe au Mali*. France : L'Harmattan; Martin, P., Martin, S. & Weil, P. 2002. "Best Practice Options: Mali". *International Migration*, 40(3): pp. 87-99.

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[65] Jonsson, G., 'The Mirage of migration: migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke Village', *Band 466 von Specialerække (Institut for Antropologi)*, 2007.
[66] Migration Policy Institute, EU Migration Partnerships: A Work in Progress, December 2017.

1. To what extent does the so-called 'culture of migration' still contribute today to migration aspirations in Kayes, Mali?

This section explores the extent to which the 'culture of migration', a phenomenon for which 'migration becomes the norm and staying the exception',[67] documented in the Kayes region since the 1980s, still shapes Kayesians' migration aspirations today. In particular, it focuses on examining (1) how migration is perceived by young adults and other community members, and why; (2) what the degree of perceived social expectation towards migration is; and (3) how the above contribute to define present day migration aspirations of young men.

KEY FINDINGS

- The vast majority of respondents (99/110) held a very positive perception of migration, which reportedly resulted from: the visible private investments migrants had made in respondents' villages of origin (69/110); migrants' contributions to community infrastructures, such as schools, water holes and electricity networks (44/110) and the social mobility respondents felt migration had brought to community members who had migrants in the family (29/110).
- In order to be perceived beneficial, migration needed to be directed towards Europe, in most cases France, which, for the vast majority of individuals interviewed, remained the most attractive destination (102/110), primarily for financial reasons.
- For young men, migration was seen as the norm, with community members expecting young men of the community to migrate one day (95/109). The majority of young men reportedly aspired to do so (58/80). Young women were only expected to migrate within the framework of family reunification.
- Migration was largely described as a household livelihood strategy, in which some household members were singled out to leave, while others stayed to take care of the family. The decision to migrate – including the *who* - was taken at the household level, by the head of household.
- An individual's inability to leave due to a lack of funds or their inability to reach their intended destination were accepted as an act of fate. However, any young man who wished to stay in the community rather than migrating was generally perceived poorly. In such cases, an individual was described as lazy or as not having the best interests of their family in mind. This illustrates the strong expectation that young men in the community should migrate and the possible repercussions if they do not.

Perception of migration

How is migration perceived?

Migration was perceived as extremely positive by the vast majority of II respondents (99 out of 110), all KIs and FGDs, regardless of whether respondents were prospective migrants, other community members or community leaders. This positive perception was either based on the direct experience of benefitting from migration within the household or the community, or on assumptions made from witnessing what migration had brought to other families, the community, and to the region more broadly.

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[67] Kandel, W. and D.S. Massey. *The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis*. Social Forces 80:981–1004, 2002.

Figure 8: Key reasons migration is perceived positively

Migrants cover all day-to-day expenses of their household	93
Migrants invest into infrastructures which benefit the whole community	66
Migrants (re-)build their household's houses in cement	32
Migrants receive personal gains from migrating (money, assets,…)	14
Migrants hold particular social prestige in the community	12
Migrants support poorer households in the community	5

1. At the household level

The majority of respondents described migration as crucial for assuring the well-being of the household by covering all day-to-day expenses, in particular food, health expenditures and school fees (reported in 93 out of 110 IIs). Migration also allows the construction of modern houses of better quality, in cement, rather than the otherwise used clay (32 out of 110). The meaning of 'covering all expenses' differed between households with members abroad and those without. Respondents from households with members abroad talked about 'bringing prosperity to the family' (7 out of 64).[68] In contrast, individuals without household members abroad talked about 'assuring food' for the family (7 out of 64).

> *Households with migrants in the family do not suffer like us; those families live better because their food is assured.*
>
> Peulh man from a household without migrants abroad, 60 years old.

Migration benefits were perceived differently depending on the socio-economic status of the household which corresponded to the distinction between households with and without household members abroad. A household that had already been receiving support from members abroad saw migration as a means of further increasing their wealth. In contrast, for a poor family, migration was perceived as the way to bring about drastic change and to allow the household a path out of poverty. Among community members without relatives abroad, the majority found that having at least one member of the household abroad would certainly improve their family's condition (10 out of 15). Four of them expressed this in terms of enabling their family to get out of their long-standing condition of poverty, or presenting migration as an answer to perceived stagnation (4 out of 10).[69] Some respondents also reported migration as a useful revenue which can be reinvested, within a broader household strategy, either in family activities (e.g. farming or gardening) in the village (4 out of 10), or to help other household members to migrate (2 out of 10).

2. At the community level

Interviewed community leaders (5) explained that diaspora contributions to build community infrastructures, such as schools, mosques, water towers, and electricity networks, have historically been decisive for the development of the region of Kayes,[70] and continue to be important today. The majority of respondents with household members abroad reported that their relatives currently contributed to such community projects (45 out of 48), in addition to providing individual support to villagers in need (3 out of 48). Most community members without household members abroad reported benefitting from services and infrastructures financed by

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[68] Among prospective migrants, 64 respondents indicated that their migration would allow the household to cover "all expenses".
[69] Please note that respondents could cite more than one perceived advantage.
[70] Please also see the history section of this report.

the diaspora, illustrating the communal benefit migrants brought (13 out of 15). Prospective migrants also expressed the desire to contribute to community projects (12 out of 73) and to help poorer households in need (2 out of 73) through their own prospective migration. All FGD participants confirmed how important diaspora projects were for the village, and stressed the role of migration in furnishing support to poorer people.

3. At the personal level

Personal benefits of migration were mentioned much less than gains at the household or community levels. This highlights the nature of migration as a joint endeavour (within the household and the community), but may also be an indication of the taboo associated with stressing personal gains over communal ones. Only 14 respondents mentioned having received personal gains from migration. In particular, they reported having received money, clothes, personal assets (e.g. phones and motorcycles),

> *Yes, migration would be positive for me because if I leave, I can realise my dreams, I can build houses, get married, and help my brothers with our family's expenses.*
>
> Soninke man from a household with members abroad, 18 years old.

and work equipment (e.g. tractors) from household members abroad (often their brothers). Prospective migrants also saw potential 'personal gains' if they were able to realise their migration aspirations. Such respondents talked about aiming to achieve financial autonomy in order to 'realise their dreams'. Five respondents explicitly said that if they migrated they would be able to marry the 'woman of their dreams'. Four mentioned that through migration they would discover new places and improve their education.

4. Social prestige

Migration was often linked to a broader idea of achieving social prestige for the entire family. Although social reputation and prestige were openly reported in a limited number of cases (12 out of 110), they were frequently implied when respondents mentioned the activities financed by migrants in their community, such as the construction of modern houses in cement and the contribution to community infrastructure. Respondents also mentioned migrants' ability to finance a proper burial for their loved ones, a strong indicator of social prestige in the community. As suggested by secondary sources,[71] by financing community projects, which can include building mosques, water towers, schools, and other structures, migrants maintain a connection to the village and gain status for their families.

Economic wealth, social markers and prestige resulting from migration were closely intertwined in Kayesien villages, a **phenomenon well recorded in academic literature.** Building modern houses enhances the socio-economic status of a household, but also becomes an obligation for a migrant, and generates 'emulative jealousy'.[72] Further, the possibility of getting married and establishing a family also mark manhood and the transition to adulthood.[73] Some sources also suggest that the prestige of the household and of the village itself is measured in terms of the quality of its infrastructure (e.g. homes in cement at the household level, electricity at the village level).[74] In this context, manhood and migration become interlinked, with migration perceived as the most direct path to success.

> *The idea is that you leave for Europe in order to prepare your future, to get married with the woman of your dreams. You can also earn the respect within the community, and within your own family.*
>
> Soninke man with migrants in the household, 33 years old.

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[71] Kleinman J., 2019, "Adventure Capital: Migration and the Making of an African Hub in Paris", University of California Press; Daum C., 1998 "Les associations de Maliens en France. Migration, développement et citoyenneté", Karthala, Paris.

[72] Gaibazzi P., "Migration, Soninke Young Men And The Dynamics Of Staying Behind (The Gambia)", 2010, p. 138.

[73] Kleinman J., 2019, "Adventure Capital: Migration and the Making of an African Hub in Paris", University of California Press; Smith D. J., 2017, "To Be a Man Is Not a One-Day Job: Masculinity, Money, and Intimacy in Nigeria", University of Chicago Press; Jonsson G., "Migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke village", IMI Working Papers. International Migration Institute, 2008.

[74] Kleinman J., 2019, "Adventure Capital: Migration and the Making of an African Hub in Paris", University of California Press.

Factors influencing the perception of migration

The notion of migration as a means of obtaining prosperity and prestige does not come from an abstract idea, but instead takes the shape of concrete, tangible examples in the village. The most commonly reported source of the idea that migration is positive were the investments of (previous) migrants in the village. This included both private construction of modern houses in cement (69 out of 110) and infrastructure for public use, financed by the diaspora abroad, allowing '*the whole region to develop*' (44 out of 110). Multiple respondents reported cases of poor households which had '*changed their fate from one day to another*' thanks to the successful migration of one of their members (29 out of 110). Based on such '*miracles*', migration came to represent, to them, *the* means to escape poverty. In particular during FGDs carried out among prospective migrants, participants emphasised that those who lived abroad and regularly returned looked 'smarter' ('*plus révéillés*').

> **Box 2: Main reported sources of positive perception of migration**
>
> 1. Private investments in the village (69/110)
> 2. Contribution to community infrastructures (44/110)
> 3. Social mobility (29/110)
> 4. Social consideration and prestige (9/110)
> 5. Other people's achievements (9/110)
> 6. Culture, tradition (4/110)

> *No, migration is not beneficial for me because there are more losses than gains. For me, if you can find something to do here, it is better, and you will be close to your family.*
>
> Soninke woman without migrants in the household, 30 years old.

Respondents who did not think of migration as beneficial felt that migration was too risky to attempt due to the already vulnerable situation of their household (7 out of 80, all prospective migrants). They considered migration a very risky choice, which could, in case of failure, further expose their family to vulnerability and keep the family apart for a prolonged period. Four of these respondents were women, including one whose husband had migrated in West Africa for a few years without earning much, and two men who personally knew other households who were suffering because they had invested all their savings into sending one member abroad, who, once in Europe, was not able to support them. To them, migration was 'not worth it'. According to migration theories, this group can be considered 'voluntary non-migrants', who stay because of a belief that non-migration is preferable to migration.[75]

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[75] The evaluation of migration as an option also needs to be situated in relation to social norms and expectations, as well as to macro-level context of obstacles and opportunities. Carling J, Schewel K. "Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration", Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44(6), 945-963.

Box 3: The negative side effects of migrants' irregular situation in Europe on communities of origin in Kayes

The effects of restrictive migration policies, in addition to increasing migrants' vulnerability in Europe, can stretch as far as migrants' countries of origin. In particular, the inability of migrants to freely circulate between the country of destination and country of origin (i.e. engage in circular migration) has strong negative effects on communities.[1]

Although the overwhelming majority of respondents (99/110) perceived migration positively, multiple respondents mentioned that migration can also carry negative side effects (30 out of 53).[2] Most reported negative consequences were connected with migrants' irregular situation at destination in Europe and consequent inability to freely circulate between destination and origin. Most negative effects are reportedly felt at the household level, and include prolonged separation between the migrant in Europe and his wife and family at home (21 out of 30), often caused by the migrants' inability to return when in an irregular situation (5 out of 20); the long-term loss of a much needed additional labour force (10 out of 30) and a household's dependency on migration, experienced as negative because it increases the household's vulnerability when the person abroad is unable to send money home, more frequent when the migrant is in an irregular situation (7 out of 30). FGDs conducted among older community members stressed how, in such cases, this translates into an extra burden for 'wealthier' diaspora members who have to step in to provide support to those households left vulnerable by their members' unsuccessful migration. Other negative consequences cited include (4) the household's concern for the person abroad, especially if irregular (6 out of 30) and (5) increased inequality within the same family, when not all households from the same family have members abroad, hence some households end up holding more economic and social prestige than others.[3]

> **Main negative side effects of migration reported**
>
> 1. **Long-term separation** from family and wife (21/30)
> 2. **Loss of labour force** (10/30)
> 3. **Household's dependency on migration and resulting vulnerability** (7/30)
> 4. **Concern** for the person abroad (6/30)
> 5. **Increased inequality** within the same family (1/30)

KIs and FGDs also reported migrants' prolonged separation from their family as the main negative consequence of migration. Some IIs extended the scale of the issue from a household to a community level problem (notably in relation to a long-term loss of labour force, 8). Wives are left alone to raise and educate the children and, when they get married with the husband already abroad, they have to wait many years for their husband to return before being able to have children. For migrants' wives, who also experience the social pressure of having children, this was reported to be a possible cause for divorce and social disintegration.

Many other II respondents mentioned only the positive sides of having a migrant in the household (23 out of 53), although the majority of them specified that migration 'brings happiness' only if everything goes well; that is when the migrant works, sends money home regularly and is able to return to Mali on a regular basis (13 out of 23).

1. This is also confirmed by other secondary sources, see for instance: Vickstrom, E. R., 2019, *"Pathways and Consequences of Legal Irregularity"*, on the case of Senegalese migrants in France, Italy, and Spain.
2. For the purpose of exploring possible negative sides of migration, only answers from respondents with relatives abroad (included KIs and FGDs) are reported here.
3. Respondents could give multiple responses.

Perceived differences by destination

According to the vast majority of people interviewed, Europe remains the preferred destination (102 out of 110). As suggested by other secondary sources, several factors make Europe attractive to respondents, particularly because it appears to present '*an earning opportunity that cannot be matched by merely urban or regional migration in Africa*'[76]. Based on the primary data collected in this study, people report the following reasons: better paid jobs,

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[76] Jonsson G., 2008, [Migration Aspirations and Immobility in a Malian Soninke Village](#), p.11.

and 'more money' (78 out of 110), possibility of receiving a state pension (receiving money regularly each month, 23 out of 110), a better exchange rate (17 out of 110), role models of previous migrants from the region (4 out of 110) and more possibilities to find work (2 out of 110). Europe, and France in particular, is a preferred destination also because it is where migration from the region has historically been directed.[77] '*It is the Soninke dream*', in the words of one respondent, and is linked to prestige, also based on the benefits migration to France has brought to the area in the past (2 out of 110).

Europe is the location of much of the Kayesian diaspora who can facilitate the migration process for a young man. Although such transnational networks also exist in other African countries,[78] migration towards places like the Ivory Coast, Gabon, and Congo Brazzaville were less appealing to many interviewed prospective migrants because of the prevalence of incidents like crime and violence. Respondents also indicated a 'disrespect for human rights' in these countries.[79] Higher earnings and respect for human rights were the most frequently reported reasons for choosing Europe as the preferred destination among all KIs and FGD participants as well. Contacts at destination may help to facilitate migration, but they alone were not found to be a sufficient reason for deciding on the destination.

Figure 9: Reported reasons for choosing the country of destination
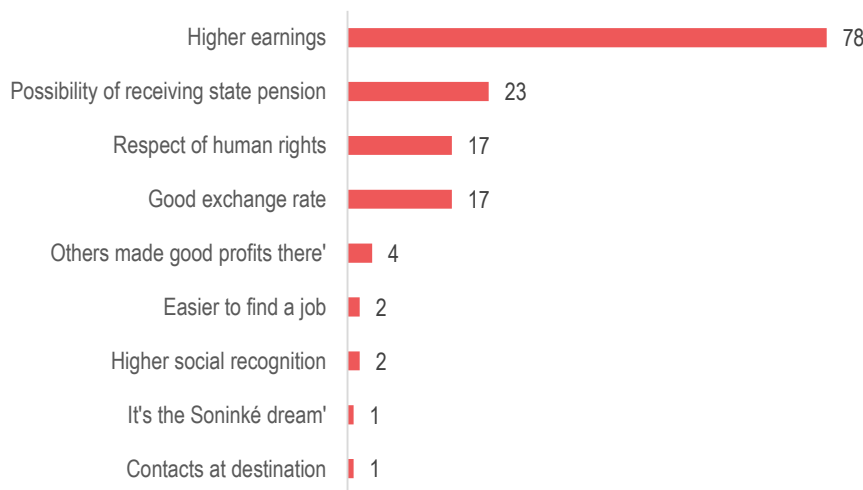
Only one respondent indicated 'any place where you already have contacts' when answering this question. This echoes the findings of a recent study conducted in Italy by REACH, in collaboration with the MMC, in which Malian diaspora members did not appear to act as a direct '*pull*' factor, but rather indirectly encouraged imagination and hope for a better life in Europe.[80] Although in respondents' imagination migrants did not act as a direct '*pull*' factor, migration network theories as well as the structure of migration in Kayes suggest that **the structural determinants which make people want to migrate to France in particular are very strong.**

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[77] Please consult chapter 'history'.
[78] Whitehouse, B., 2009. 'Transnational childrearing and the preservation of transnational identity in Brazzaville, Congo', Global networks, 9 (1): 82-99.
[79] Respondents could report more than one reason.
[80] REACH/MMC, Outspoken but unheard: How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route, October 2019.

Box 4: Poverty as self-reported primary driver of migration

In all interviews and FGDs conducted, poverty, and its role as the primary 'push factor' of migration in the region, was stressed. At the same time, Kayes is one of the most prosperous regions in Mali. Previous research has shown that it is frequently not the poorest of the poor who migrate, due to their lack of resources to do so.[1] The frequency by which poverty as the key migration driver was reported in this context - where networks, history and many other factors are intensely present in shaping the imaginary of migration - illustrates a certain migration discourse and, with it, researchers' need to be aware and mitigate such discourse when relaying self-reported migration data. The categories of 'poverty' or 'lack of economic opportunities' are present in almost every study exploring migration drivers. What emerges from this study is that these categories explain very little about the complexity in which migration aspirations are formed.

'Migration as the only way out of poverty', as frequently reported by respondents in this study, then becomes both a reality in respondents' lives, but also insufficient in actually understanding why people migrate and the implications thereof on migration and development programming.

1. See, for instance: de Haan, Yacub, Migration and Poverty: Linkages, Knowledge Gaps and Policy Implications, 2009.

Perceived differences by gender

Almost all respondents, 108 out of 109 who answered the question, indicated that the 'task' to migrate is still assigned only to men, with most women migrating only within the framework of family reunification. Only five respondents (three women and two men) considered the option for a woman of travelling alone for either work reasons or to pursue higher education.

Migration expectations

Are young adults expected to migrate?

The vast majority of respondents reportedly expected young people (approx. 17-30 years old), either from their family or the community, to migrate one day (95 out of 109).[81] The top three reasons[82] for expecting young people to migrate were 'migration is the norm' (38 out of 77); a lack of work at home (13), and the young adult's social responsibility towards the family to provide for them (12). The latter acquired different connotations among individuals with and without household members abroad. Among the first group, such responsibility meant maintaining their family's 'wealth' and 'prestige' by younger members having to 'take their turn' and replace older relatives in Europe.

On the other side, **individuals without household members abroad felt the responsibility of needing to raise their family out of poverty**, as migration was seen as the 'only way out' of poverty. Three respondents among those without relatives abroad reported a perceived increase in pressure and social expectation towards the new generation to migrate. All KIs and FGD participants confirmed this strong social pressure to leave, expressed in terms of necessity to take on the responsibility of the family by continuing the traditional practice of migration. FGD respondents among older villagers expressed concern about young people who, under the pressure of trying to meet such expectations, are forced to take the irregular route.

> *Here young people relate to migrants' lives, their nice houses and so on. This creates jealousy among the youth. This is normal - a boy who is not jealous does not have a heart.*
>
> Soninke man from a household without members abroad, 58 years old.

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[81] Note that one person did not answer the question.
[82] Note that only 77 respondents out of 95 who reportedly expected young people to leave gave a reason for their expectation.

Table 3: Most reported reasons for expecting young people to leave[83]

	Respondents with family members abroad (n=46)	Respondents without family members abroad (n=31)
1	It's "normal" (27)	It's "normal" (11)
2	There are no jobs here (8)	It's the "only way out" (7)
3	"It's their turn" (5)	There are no jobs here (5)

A minority of respondents reported that they expected their family members to stay (10 out of 109). In this context, the main reported reasons were that potential members were still too young (5), that they felt the family was too poor to be able to attempt migration (1), or because the family disagreed with irregular migration, which was assumed to be the only viable route (1).[84]

Did community members with family abroad expect their relatives to leave?

The majority of interviewed community members with relatives abroad reportedly expected their relative(s) to leave before they did so (35 out of 55). [85] Of those who gave a reason,[86] the majority said they expected their relative to leave either because the journey itself had been organised by the family (10 out of 34), or because the decision to migrate had been collectively discussed (9 out of 34). Others reported that 'people grow up with the idea of migrating one day' (9 out of 34), showing how rooted transnational movements are and how these become the norm.[87] The remaining five respondents answered that they felt the person would leave because their family was at the time very poor, with migration perceived as the only way to change this (5 out of 34). Of these, three belonged to households with only a recent migration history, as they reported their fathers and husband were the first family members to migrate, and that they had all travelled irregularly. Thus, poorer people with no established transnational networks leave as well, and they often do so via irregular paths.

> *Yes, I knew that my brothers and I we would have left one day, because this is part of our history, of our life. And also our children who are here today, they will leave one day.*
>
> Soninke man from a household with members abroad, 55 years old.

Box 5: Migration as a household-level livelihood strategy

Frequently, respondents described migration as a collective decision within the household as it was also a livelihood strategy employed to diversify income sources. In households with an established history of migration, such decisions were taken by the head of household, who would choose who would be allowed to go and when. In such cases, young men usually reported being impatient to leave, waiting eagerly for 'their turn' after their elder brothers. Notably, while the head of household selected who would migrate, they also designated who within the men of the household would stay to take care of the family's affairs in the village and the fields or animals of the household. While heads of households and community elders stressed that in such a set-up all roles were key to the welfare of the household, among younger respondents it emerged that being the migrant was perceived as more 'glamorous' than staying and, as such, as the option significantly preferred by young men eager to prove themselves.

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[83] Multiple answers apply. Only responses with a minimum of n=3 are reported in the table.

[84] Remaining four respondents did not know what to answer (4 out of 109).

[85] A minority held that they did not expect their relative to leave (12 out of 55), and this was reportedly mainly due to the fact that their departure came as a surprise because they did not have any money (3 out of 10), or because the family disagreed with their decision (2 out of 10).
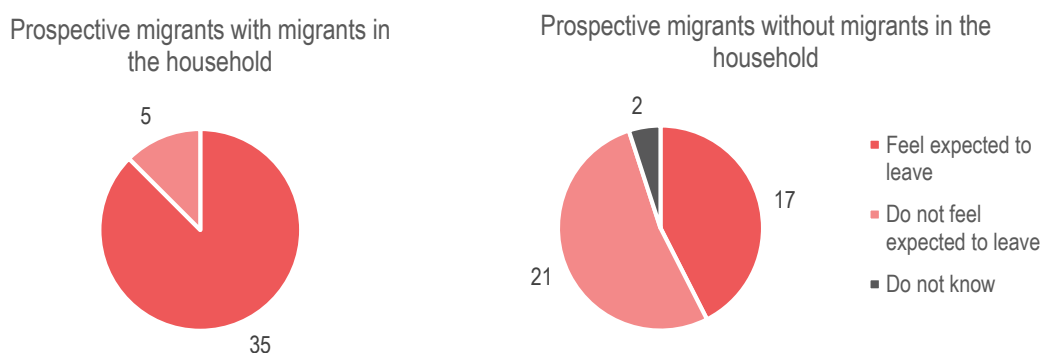
[86] 34 out of 35 respondents who reportedly had expected their relative to leave, gave a motivation.

[87] This is in line with what constitutes a "culture of migration", as described by Jonsson in her work. "Migration Aspirations and Immobility in a Malian Soninke Village" (2008).

Do young adults feel expected to migrate?

More than half of prospective migrants reportedly felt they were expected to migrate (52 out of 80), compared to one third who did not feel this sense of expectation (26 out of 80).[88] A difference emerged between respondents with and without household members abroad. The majority of interviewed prospective migrants with relatives abroad felt they were expected to migrate (35 out of 40), while less than half of their counterparts without relatives abroad felt the same (17 out of 40). This suggests that individuals with a history of migration in the family may take migration for granted in their life's trajectory, a beaten path they are expected to follow. On the other side, individuals without relatives abroad may still consider different options and weigh the risks irregular migration entails, before they, or their families, feel that migration is more desirable than staying.

Figure 10: Prospective migrants' self-reported feeling of being expected to migrate, by respondents with and without migrants in the household

Prospective migrants with migrants in the household

5
35

Prospective migrants without migrants in the household

2
17
21

- Feel expected to leave
- Do not feel expected to leave
- Do not know

The most reported reason for feeling expected to migrate was respondents' perception of migration as part of their culture, a traditional path to follow (18 out of 52). Most of these households have a history of migration (13 out of 18). Some respondents also indicated that they had collectively discussed their departure within the family (7), and that the family was directly involved in the decision-making process (4). The latter case was cited by respondents with relatives abroad only.

Several prospective migrants explained that migration was simply a common topic of discussion within the family, where its benefits were discussed (10). Through such conversations young adults perceived it as their responsibility to go and bring those benefits home (8). This was reportedly particularly the case when respondents had older brothers or friends who had migrated before them and respondents felt expected to follow their example. Four individuals without family members abroad expressed this responsibility in terms of 'making the family proud'.

> *Yes, I feel I will migrate one day. It is our culture, here we are born to migrate.*
>
> Soninke man from a household with members abroad, 30 years old.

Table 4: Most reported reasons why prospective migrants feel expected to migrate

1.	'It is our culture'	18
2.	My family talks frequently about the advantages of migration	10
3.	I feel responsible to improve my family's situation	8
4.	My family knows I am getting ready	7
5.	The advantages of migration are so big, I can't not go	5
6.	It's a matter of pride	4
7.	My family is already organising my trip	4

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[88] Two people reportedly did not know.

Young adults who reported not feeling expected to migrate (26) said so mainly because their staying home was part of a family strategy in which each member had a designated role, either based on their gender, or because it was decided within the household. Women were generally expected to stay to look after the children and the family (11 out of 14 women reported this). Men tended to stay if other household members were already abroad and they were expected to manage the household's affairs at home.[89] This aligns with the conclusion feminist approaches to migration studies have underlined, namely that migration is a process that must also '*be negotiated vis-à-vis gendered roles of care and obligation'*.[90]

Consequences of not migrating

While most interviewed prospective migrants reportedly felt they were expected to migrate, exploring how immobility is experienced can give another indication of the social 'pressure' to migrate. This section explores the local perception of both voluntary and involuntary immobility[91] by asking about the consequences of three different kinds of immobility: (1) unwillingness to leave, (2) inability to leave, (3) inability to successfully reach the intended destination.

1. Unwillingness to leave

65 out of 110 respondents indicated that there are negative consequences for a young adult in the community who does not want to migrate. The most reported consequences, mentioned by 31 out of 65 respondents, were being considered as 'not ambitious' and 'heartless', and, as further elaborated by 23 of these respondents, as someone who 'does not care about his own family'. Others said that a person who refuses to leave is considered 'a parasite', *if* the person in question does not have another viable source of income to support themselves and their family (16 out of 65). Likewise, several respondents showed surprise when hearing the question, and affirmed that it is very rare to hear that someone does not want to leave,[92] especially if they do not have much at home (18 out of 65).

Other consequences mentioned were social isolation and disrespect within the community, because of a failure to meet social expectations (7 out of 65), and to address persistent financial difficulties (7 out of 65).[93] On the other hand, according to 43 out of 110 respondents, there were no problems if a young adult did not want to migrate, with seven of these specifying that 'they can always learn a profession and work in the village'.

> *This [not wanting to migrate] is frowned upon, because if they do not migrate how can the family get out of poverty?*
>
> Soninke woman from a household without members abroad, 55 years old.

Such findings indicate a strong social pressure on all men[94] to find a way to provide for their family, which can either be at home or abroad, more than towards migration itself. Nevertheless, since migration was perceived as much more desirable than any other activity in the village, and is often referred to as 'the only way out (of poverty)', a 'refusal' to migrate was often perceived negatively. Furthermore, as other secondary sources point out,[95] among Soninke in particular, migration has become integral to conceptions of manhood and masculinity.

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[89] Less reported responses included, all reported by two individuals: (1) respondents were still students and wished to continue their education; (2) respondents had no interest to migrate, one of them because he already had a job in his village; (3) respondents had no contacts abroad and no money to leave and (4) migration was not in respondents' household plans.

[90] Carling, J., Collins F., 2018, "Aspiration, desire, and drivers of migration", Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44:6, 909-926, p. 913.

[91] According to Carling, "those who have aspirations to migrate but lack the ability to do so, are *involuntary non-migrants*. They differ from the *voluntary non-migrants*, who stay because of a belief that non-migration is preferable to migration". Source: Carling, J. 2002 "Migration in the age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 28 (1): 5–42, p.12.

[92] For Jonsson this further proves how migration is still strongly part of the ideal life trajectory envisioned by young men. During her field work at a Soninke village, she encountered a similar reaction among respondents who "could not comprehend that a young man might not want to migrate, and they usually attributed this to the fact that he could not migrate". Jonsson G., 2008 "Migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke village", IMI Working Papers. International Migration Institute, p.29.

[93] Please note that respondents could cite more than one consequence.

[94] The lack of relevant differences in the accounts of people with and without family abroad points towards this direction.

[95] Massa, R., 2010, "Soninke Young Men And The Dynamics Of Staying Behind"; Jonsson G., 2008 "Migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke village", IMI Working Papers. International Migration Institute.

2. Inability to leave

For those young adults in the community unable to leave due to a lack of resources,[96] respondents tended to accept this forced immobility as an expression of a divine destiny (59 out of 105). However, some among them still listed various negative consequences for the individual and their family (46 out of 105). The fact that the main reported consequence was the prospective migrant's frustration at having let down their family's expectations, and having failed where their peers had succeeded (24 out of 105), suggests that at the individual level such fate is not easily accepted. Other cited negative effects included financial difficulties (14 out of 105), social disrespect (which translated into inability to marry and establish a family, 11 out of 105) and being considered weak (mentioned by 7 people, 6 of whom did not have any household member abroad).[97] Although present, judgemental forms of consequences (being considered 'not ambitious', 'heartless', 'weak') were less common compared to the case of people not wanting to migrate. This may indicate that being unable to migrate due to external factors is more acceptable than voluntarily choosing to stay.

> *There was no negative consequence for me - I tried. It is God who did not want me to leave. But the person will feel embarrassed because he did not succeed.*
>
> Soninke man from a household with members abroad, 54 years old.

3. Failure to reach the intended destination

Failure to reach the intended destination[98] was considered problematic by more than half of respondents (67 out of 107). The main reported consequences were social isolation and loss of respect, mentioned by 39 out of 67 respondents, followed by personal frustration (for having let down the family) and psychological difficulties (related to the risks encountered during the irregular journey, 27 out of 67). Financial consequences were also raised by 19 respondents, highlighting the increased vulnerability unsuccessful migration could result in for the individual and their household. In this context, two respondents reported that the only case of an 'acceptable' empty-handed return was to be expelled, repatriated and returned against 'your own will'. One respondent pointed out that returning home empty-handed may be perceived as a weakness (for example, as fear of crossing the sea), a breach of masculinity. This may indicate that a voluntary return can be problematic for migrants.

More than one third of respondents (40 out of 107) felt it was more acceptable for a person to fail to reach an intended destination than to not want to migrate in general. This was because in the first case, failure was attributed to a divine providence, beyond the scope of the individual's will. During FGDs with prospective migrants of both genders, the necessity to at least attempt to migrate in order not to incur social disrespect, and to be able to achieve recognition and respect for the ability to *'do things'* (e.g. marry, gain a position of respect in the community) was stressed.

Migration aspirations

Aspiring to migrate

Most interviewed prospective migrants reported desiring to leave if they were given the opportunity to do so (58 out of 80).[99] This was more commonly reported among respondents who already had household members abroad. Of them, seven responded they would leave 'immediately' and two said they would 'leave school and go'. Three respondents reportedly wanted to leave only if they did not find a job at home, while the remaining 19 said they would rather stay.

Most of those who responded they would rather stay (16 out of 19) were individuals without household members abroad, and eleven of them were women, illustrating the gendered nature of migration in Kayes.

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[96] Meaning here financial, social or human capital sources. Carling, J. 2002 "Migration in the age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 28 (1): 5–42.

[97] Please note that five respondents did not answer to the question, and that respondents could cite more than one consequence.

[98] Such as the case, for example, of many migrants directed towards the EU but stuck in Libya, Algeria, Morocco, or who were repatriated.

[99] Meaning here the possibility of obtaining the means they felt they needed to travel towards a preferred destination.

Figure 11: Prospective migrants' aspiration to migrate if they were given the opportunity to, by respondents with and without migrants in the household

■ Prospective migrants with migrants in the household

■ Prospective migrants without migrants in the household
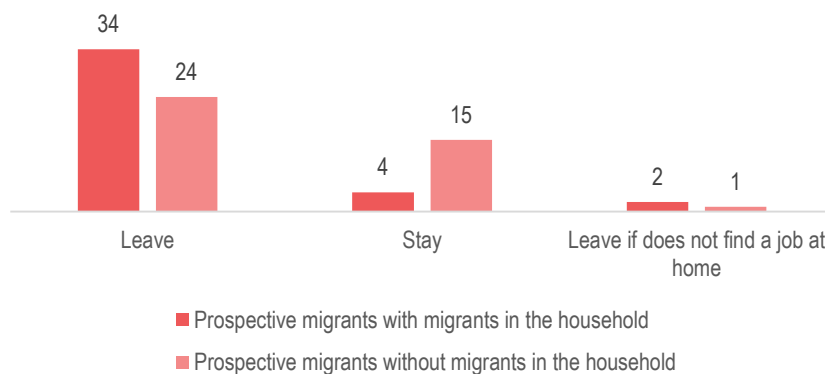
The main reported reasons for preferring to stay were related to a household strategy for the respondent to stay, because respondents were women and, as such, expected to take care of family or because the respondents' household considered itself 'too poor' to invest in risky (and potentially unsuccessful) migration. Mirroring the accounts on the perception of preferred migration destinations, the majority of those who wanted to leave would like to reach Europe (53 out of 56 who indicated a preference, with 37 specifying France), and, to a much lesser extent, the United States (2 out of 56) and Brazil (1 out of 56).

When asked if respondents intended to eventually return to their village, half reported they would return only if they succeeded in their migration, defined as obtaining papers and earning money (22 out of 46).[100] Multiple others replied they would regularly visit their family if given the opportunity (through obtaining papers, 17 out of 46), while some expressed their intention to return to the village to invest there (e.g. in farming, 5 out of 46). This suggests a strong existing connection between prospective migrants and their ancestral village. Many of them intend to return and often invest in the village, but feel they are entitled to do so only if their migration is successful.

Preparing to migrate

The majority of prospective migrants had reportedly not taken any steps towards migration yet (65 out of 80), mostly due to a lack of funds (20 out of 35).[101] This was reported by seven individuals with relatives abroad, showing that even respondents with household members abroad may not necessarily have sufficient resources to act on their migration aspirations. Equally, among those with relatives abroad, some reported they had not acted yet because they were waiting for their contacts to help them (5) or more generally waiting for the family's permission to leave (2). Three said they were still studying and their 'moment had not come yet' (3). The remaining five had no intention to leave, or, in one case, had not decided yet.

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[100] Note that only 46 out of 58 respondents who said they would prefer to leave answered to this question. The definition of 'success' in migration was based on respondents' reporting.
[101] Please note that only 35 respondents elaborated on their reasons for not taking steps towards migration.

Figure 12: Reported reasons for having never acted towards migration, by prospective migrants with and without household members abroad

■ respondents without migrants in the household ■ respondent with migrants in the household
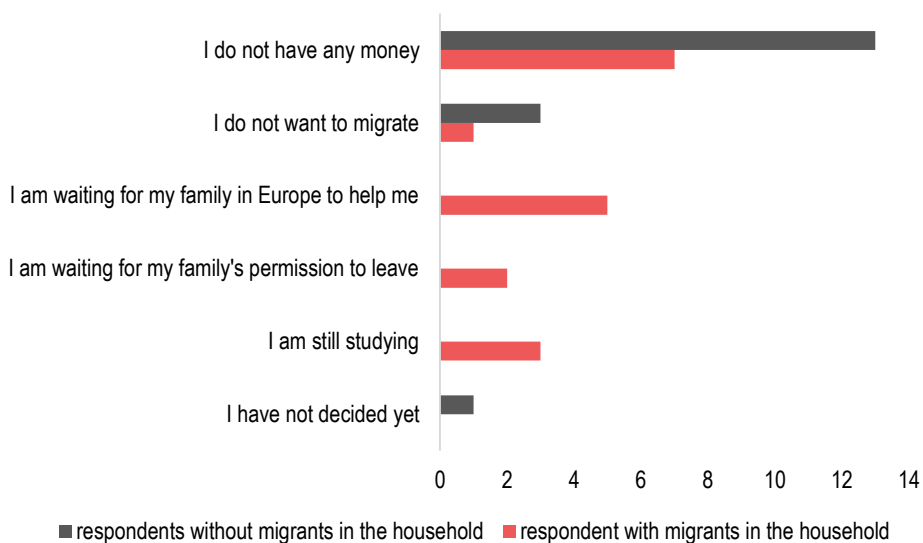
Fifteen out of 80 respondents had already acted towards migration in the past. Half of them had no household members abroad (8 out of 15). Reported steps taken towards migration were:[102] (1) already attempted and failed migration towards Europe, West Africa, and North Africa, mentioned by nine respondents, of which five were individuals without family members abroad; (2) started to collect money, mentioned by five people, three of whom had already tried once and were preparing another attempt; (3) four respondents had started procedures for acquiring documents (i.e. National Identification Number (NINA) Card,[103] passport). These accounts suggest that individuals from households without household members abroad, and with limited means, also attempt migration.

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[102] Please note that respondents could mention more than one action.
[103] The NINA card is an "identification card" indicating the cardholder's national identification number (NINA number). For more information, please see here.

2. To what extent have external factors, such as the EU and EU member states' increasingly restrictive migration policies in the past twenty years, impacted and shaped migration dynamics within the assessed communities?

This section explores the extent to which external factors, with a focus on increasingly restrictive policies on migration towards Europe in the past 20 years, have shaped migration dynamics in the assessed communities.[104] More specifically, it focuses on (1) recent changes in migration from the assessed communities, as witnessed by respondents, in terms of the journey, life at destination and contributions by migrants abroad and (2) the impact of witnessed changes on migration aspirations, including migration decision-making and choice of destination.

KEY FINDINGS

- Most respondents (106/107) reported that the journey had become more difficult compared to 20 years ago, with migration to Europe having become irregular for most individuals in the community.
- Most respondents indicated a worsening of life conditions at destination (64/110). All reported changes related to migrants' situation of irregularity in Europe.
- Despite the self-reported knowledge of the deterioration of the journey and life at destination, all respondents (110/110) reported that people wanted to leave anyway. The majority of respondents (60/108) felt migration was still the only option for young men in the community. For the others, staying was reportedly an option for the youth, albeit a 'poor, inferior' alternative to migration (48/108).
- More restrictive policies governing migration towards Europe have apparently not led to a change in the destination of choice. The vast majority of respondents (92/98), confirmed that the EU and, more specifically, France, remained the preferred destination by far.

Changes in migration dynamics in the last 20 years

As migration plays an integral part in many Kayesiens' everyday lives,[105] most respondents were acutely aware of changes in migration dynamics in the region. The vast majority of changes cited were framed in relation to increasingly restrictive migration policies in the EU and its member states and, correspondingly, the rise in irregular migration from the community. Changes were identified in terms of (1) the types of journeys, (2) life at destination, and (3) the contributions the family and community of origin received from migrants abroad.

Changes in migrants' journeys

Almost all respondents reported that the migration journey to Europe had become much more difficult and more dangerous, compared to 20 years ago (106 out of 107). This was reportedly reflected both in terms of the option between regular and irregular migration and in terms of the irregular routes open to respondents. Most reported reasons why the journey was perceived as both more difficult and dangerous than in the past were (1) that the majority of migrants' journeys nowadays were irregular; (2) that more irregular migration had led to more controls, and, correspondingly, heightened reliance on smugglers and a rise in smugglers' fees and (3) the overall heightened difficulty to obtain residence permits once in Europe, making life at destination more challenging.

All deteriorations cited in relation to migrants' journeys were related to the heightened difficulty to travel by regular means to Europe. Respondents in FGDs confirmed that obtaining visas had become so difficult for community members that the irregular route was the only route open to most aspiring migrants in the community. This was confirmed by all community leaders interviewed (5) who held that migration policies introduced in the last 20 years made legal travel for community members virtually impossible, as visa requirements, in terms of the applicant's level of education, savings etc., were out of reach for almost all their community members. According to one community leader, the costs of being granted a visa to Europe – which would need to include bribes paid at

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[104] Please note that while 'migration' in this context was defined broadly, so as to include all forms of migration (incl. internal, regional, international), when asked, respondents automatically associated the term 'migration' to international migration, mostly towards France, as this was the predominant type of migration in their community. This is reflected in the findings and relates back to the history of migration in the region (for further information, please consult the sub-section on history in this section).

[105] Please consult the section 'Historical and recent context of migration dynamics in Kayes' for further information.

every step of the application process – amount to around 4 million CFA (the equivalent of 6,000 EUR)[106] for community members. This figure was reportedly out of reach, even for individuals who already had household members abroad.

Table 5: Main changes in the journey reported compared to 20 years ago

1.	Most travel irregularly now	76
2.	Visas are more difficult to obtain	35
3.	More community members attempt to migrate	45
4.	More community members are abroad	12
5.	Less individual earnings than in the past	4
6.	There are less departures, because it is too risky	3
7.	Less people succeed in reaching their intended destination	1
8.	Increase in deportations from Europe	1
9.	Migrants are younger than in the past	1

The majority of respondents further specified that the irregular sea route had become more dangerous over the past 20 years (70 out of 82). This was reportedly due to heightened controls along the coast of Libya, once the main departure area, which led to smugglers using smaller boats and taking more covert routes, reported by 19 respondents. Ten respondents mentioned a rise in dangers faced prior to reaching the sea, notably the risk of torture and abuse in Libya, as a further deterioration of the journey compared to the past.

Changes in life at destination

According to the majority of respondents, life once in Europe had become more difficult for Kayesian migrants compared to the past (35 out of 64).[107] When asked about the challenges community members faced in Europe, all challenges cited related to migrants' irregular situation, including: problems with finding work (21 out of 35); problems with accessing residence permits (20 out of 35); challenges in finding accommodation without a regular status (10 out of 35) and overall more controls vis-a-vis irregular migrants in Europe (5 out of 35). Community leaders and FGD participants echoed the same challenges, notably in relation to finding work, obtaining papers and finding accommodation.

Figure 13: Reported perception of changes at destination in the last 20 years, by respondents with and without household members abroad

respondents with migrants in the household
respondents without migrants in the household
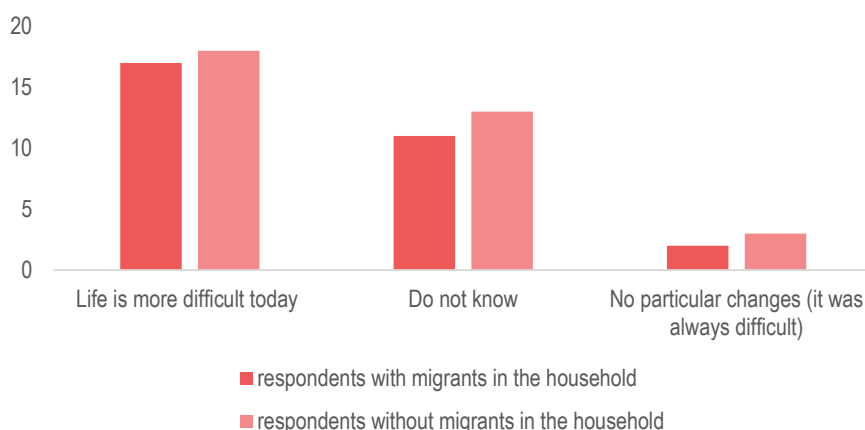
More than one third of community member respondents reportedly had no idea about migrants' life conditions abroad. Among them, individuals with and without household members abroad were almost equally represented (11 compared to 13). This suggests that even where individuals have migrants in the family they are not necessarily well informed about their family members' situation in Europe. For example, only very rarely did respondents know the profession of their family member in Europe. Such selective information sharing was also

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[106] For the exchange rate, please see here.
[107] Please note that not all respondents responded to this question.

found in a REACH study, conducted in collaboration with the MMC, on the role of the diaspora in Italy in shaping migration decision-making, and **underlines the imaginary of migration: what community members did abroad was much less important than the fact that they were abroad supporting the family and wider community in the village of origin.**[108]

Figure 14: Challenges reported for migrants abroad, by respondents with and without household members abroad

respondents with migrants in the household

respondents without migrants in the household
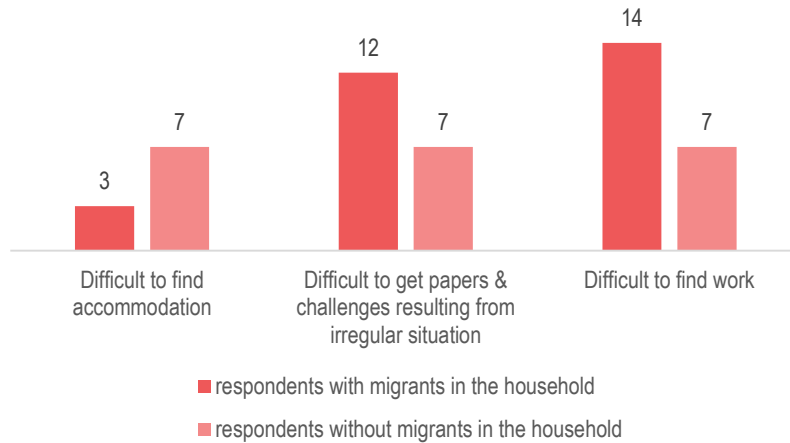
Changes in migrants' contributions in the community of origin
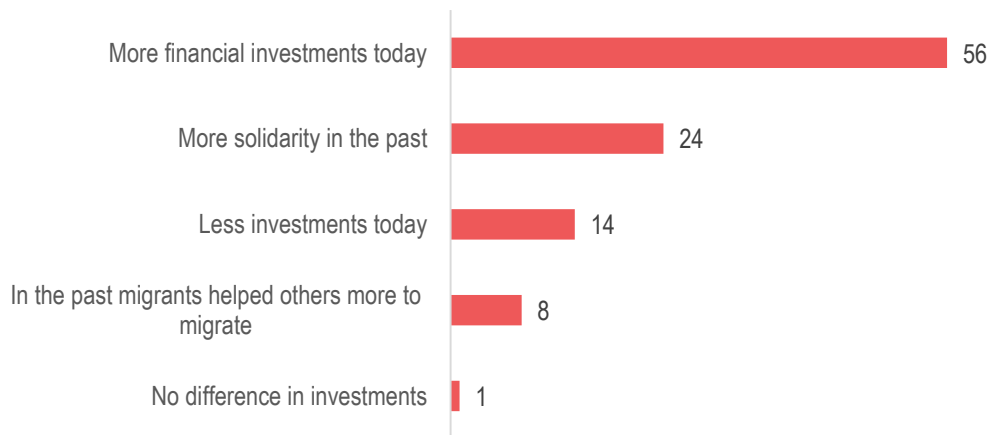
While the majority of respondents perceived both the journey and life in Europe as more difficult compared to 20 years ago, the majority also felt that migrants contributed more to the community nowadays than they did in the past (56 out of 86)**.** Examples thereof included an increase in investments in the village which benefitted the community as a whole, such as building of roads and mosques, but also creation of income-generating structures, such as fish rearing ponds and greenhouses. In comparison, respondents held that migrants of the previous generations used their income to primarily support individual families, by buying foods and ensuring basic subsistence. KIs and FGD participants echoed these findings, reporting that nowadays migrants were able to help both the community and individual families more than they used to. This was also confirmed by secondary data.[109]

At the same time, slightly more than one quarter of respondents held that previous generations of migrants showed more solidarity with their community of origin than those currently abroad (24 out of 86). When asked why, respondents explained that in the past there were less migrants overall, which meant that, when a migrant returned to the village, they were more keen to offer individual support to others in the community through small in-hand offerings. Some respondents felt that migrants showed more solidarity that way than through the more organised, structured investments that migrants of more recent generations tended to make in the village. While 14 respondents felt there were less investments by current migrants than by those in the past, a further 8 held that migrants of previous generations were more likely to help others in the community to migrate to Europe. This was associated with previous generations' higher capacity to help and the greater ease with which migration could be achieved in the past.

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[108] REACH/MMC, Outspoken but unheard: How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route, October 2019.
[109] See for instance: Rapport, FSP-cpo-développement, 2004, retrieved from: CADERKAF, Répertoire des associations de la région de Kayes en France, 2007.

Figure 15: Reported changes in migration dynamics compared to the past

More financial investments today	56
More solidarity in the past	24
Less investments today	14
In the past migrants helped others more to migrate	8
No difference in investments	1

When asked why respondents perceived there to be more investments by migrants compared to the past, and how this sat with the facts of more difficult journeys and many migrants' irregular situation in Europe, respondents reported that presently *more* community members were abroad (irregularly) than in the past. While previously only one household member would be abroad, supporting the entire household back home, now households with migrants in the family typically had several members abroad. This meant that, **while individual migrants' contributions may be small, due to frequently precarious working conditions in Europe, overall earnings of community members abroad added up to more than the earnings of previous generations.** As such, despite understanding that migration had become more difficult, migration was still perceived as an attractive means of earning money with very visible impacts in the community.

Impact of recent changes on migration aspirations

Overall, community members perceived migration to Europe as more difficult and dangerous than in the past. But most also felt that migrants today, notwithstanding the difficulties of the journey and life at destination, contributed more to their families and the community than previous generations. In light of this conflicting dynamic, respondents were asked how these changes impacted the aspirations of community members to migrate, in terms of migration decision-making and the destination choice.

Impact on the decision to migrate[110]

All respondents, interviewed through IIs, KIs and FGDs, reported that, although the journey and life at destination had become harder, young male adults[111] wanted to leave anyway (145 out of 145). As community members conceded that migration to Europe had become more difficult, respondents were asked what alternative options to migration were available to young adults. **A slight majority maintained that migration was still the only option considered by male youth, notwithstanding the changes cited** (60 out of 108).[112]

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[110] Note respondents understood this as migration towards Europe, though the question was asked as an open-ended question about migration more broadly.
[111] Respondents automatically thought about this group as the population of reference as in their community they perceived young men as prospective migrants.
[112] Two individuals did not respond to this question.

Figure 16: Perception of migration and staying as options for young men in the community, based on IIs

According to 48 out of 108 respondents, staying could be an option, but was considered a poor alternative to migration. When asked about the options open to potential migrants if they stayed, options cited included: (1) farming, (2) working in trade and/or retail, (3) gardening or (4) starting a business. KIs and FGD participants explained why most of those options were perceived as unattractive by young men: with regards to the most reported option, farming, and gardening, the fourth most reported option, FGD respondents felt these to be poor alternatives to migration as working in agriculture in Kayes was hard and one never knew whether one would reach subsistence level in any given year, and would certainly never be expected to go beyond subsistence.

In contrast, to work in trade and/or retail, as well as to start a business, a young adult reportedly needed starting capital, which many in the region lacked. Additionally, such businesses risked being unsuccessful due to limited demand. Finally, some KIs held that learning a profession at home, such as becoming a tailor's apprentice and/or electrician, would unlikely yield results in Kayes: respondents perceived the apprentice system to function poorly, with youths working for years as apprentices without salary and without actually learning much.

Figure 17: Options cited for young adults who do not migrate and stay in the community
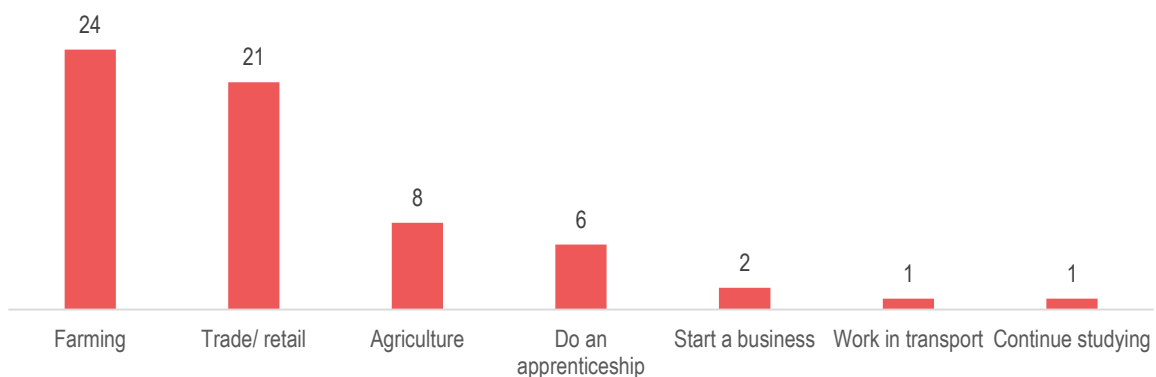
Impact on the choice of destination

For the vast majority of respondents, the EU and more specifically France, remained the preferred destination, notwithstanding more restrictive migration policies (92 out of 98).[113] While one fifth of respondents cited the emergence of alternative destinations to the EU (18 out of 98, all in the African region, particularly in Central Africa, and, to a lesser extent, North Africa), only 5 of them cited such destinations as *attractive* alternative destinations to Europe. Fifteen of the eighteen respondents felt that African countries were interim destinations where community members went to earn money before trying to reach the EU. All community leaders and FGD participants confirmed this trend and largely related it back to the perceived greater gains of migration to the EU compared to African countries (*cf. section '1.1.3. Perceived differences by destination'*).

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[113] Out of 110 II respondents who responded to this question.

3. What role does information shared through information campaigns play during the migration decision-making process?

This section explores the role of information campaigns in the migration decision-making process in the context of migration dynamics in Kayes. It explores the types of information campaigns respondents had been exposed to, respondents' perception of those campaigns and the self-reported impact the campaigns, and other sources of information, have had on respondents' perception of and decision-making related to migration.

KEY FINDINGS

- Only a third of respondents reported having been reached by an information campaign (33/110). The majority reported having heard about the risks of irregular migration from other sources, such as the news on TV/radio, social networks and returnees in the village.
- For the majority of those reached by information campaigns, the information was not new, since they reportedly already knew of the information shared through other sources (22/30).
- Among both prospective migrants and other community members who had been exposed to an information campaign, their feedback on whether or not the campaign impacted their perception of migration was mixed. A slight majority held that the campaigns did not change their perception of migration. Those who felt the campaign(s) had changed their perception qualified this statement by saying that such knowledge did not change anything in practice, as alternatives at origin remained poor and young men had to 'try their chance' either way.

Exposure to information campaigns

Slightly less than one third of respondents (33/110) reported having been reached by an information campaign.[114] Of these, the majority had heard/seen an information campaign on the radio and/or on TV (29), with the remaining four having attended an event on the risks of irregular migration which took place in their village of origin. When respondents were asked what information they remembered from the campaigns, their responses primarily related to the risks of irregular migration (including information on the situation in Libya), which was mentioned by 31 respondents. Eight of the respondents reportedly felt the aim of the campaign was specifically to discourage migration, with two remembering information on the challenges to obtain papers in Europe and another two on the potential opportunities at home. Additionally, participants of two FGD remembered information campaigns' focus on the opportunities reportedly available for young adults in the region of Kayes.

Respondents' perception of information campaigns

For two thirds of respondents interviewed (22 out of 30), and all FGD participants who had been exposed to information campaigns, the information shared by the campaign was not new. In those instances, respondents reportedly already knew about the content shared from other information sources, notably news on the radio and/or TV (7 out of 12) and returnees' stories shared in the community. For seven community members (out of 30) the information was new.[115]

While respondents tended to believe information shared when it echoed what they already knew, respondents did not trust information campaigns which were perceived as actively discouraging migration, particularly when facilitated by the government or international organisations. The majority of II respondents

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[114] An 'information campaign' was defined as any type of dissemination means which aims to disseminate information on 'migration'. The term 'migration' was defined broadly in this context, hence such campaigns could focus on a variety of migration-related topics, including the risks of irregular migration, opportunities at origin, and legal migration pathways. News items on migration (e.g. news bulletins on shipwrecks) were explicitly excluded from the definition.
[115] For the remaining respondent the information about risks was known, but information on the local opportunities was new.

(27 out of 33) and FGD participants said they trusted the information shared by information campaigns when they shared information they had heard before from sources they trusted, such as returnees and the news (see below).

In contrast, respondents were less trusting of information shared about local opportunities available for young adults in the region of Kayes, since this was reportedly in stark contrast with respondents' personal view and experience. Some community members (6 out of 33) did not trust information campaigns, especially those seen as originating from the government or foreign news outlets (Radio France Internationale (RFI) was given as an example), as their perceived aim was to discourage migration. Two community leader KIs confirmed this view, reporting that community members tended to perceive information campaigns as part of a wider strategy to deter people from migrating to Europe and hence were extremely distrustful towards the information shared.

I see the images, the tales – on WhatsApp, Facebook – all the drama. But that won't change the destination [Europe] or stop the youth from taking the route, because there is nothing here. Just nothing.

Peulh man from a household without members abroad, 39 years old.

Alternative information sources used and trusted

Several community leaders stressed that many villages in the region of Kayes hosted families where youths had lost their lives at sea or in the Sahara *en route* to Europe. As such, **respondents felt there was a general awareness of the risks of the journey, since families and communities had felt first-hand the repercussions of taking the irregular journey.** Among respondents interviewed, more than half reported having heard about the risks of irregular migration from other sources besides information campaigns (63 out of 110). Most used sources of information on irregular migration were news on the radio and/or TV (mostly in relation to shipwrecks or the situation of stranded migrants in the Sahel or Libya, 40 out of 63), information shared via social media, including Facebook and WhatsApp (19 out of 63) and information shared by returnees in the community (8 out of 63). No differences in information sources used were found between respondents who had migrants in the family and those who did not, confirming that migrants abroad do not share much about the journey and life in Europe with people back home.[116]

Figure 18: Other sources respondents were exposed to for information on the risks of irregular migration

Radio/ TV   Social networks   Returnees   Word of mouth

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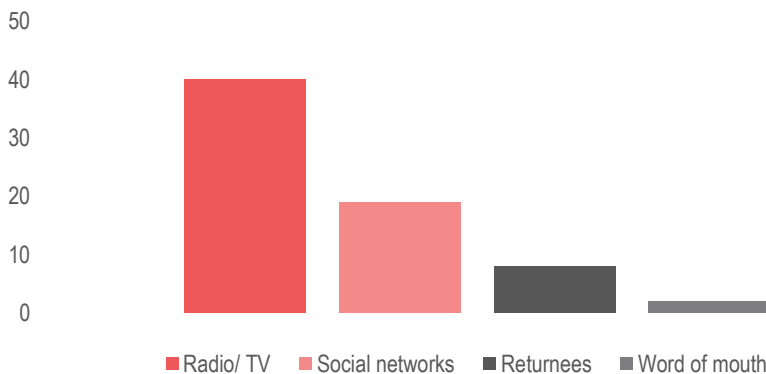
[116] See also: REACH/MMC, Outspoken but unheard: How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route, October 2019.

When asked which of these alternative information sources respondents trusted, **the most reported sources were returnees from the community (37 out of 76), news bulletins on radio and TV about shipwrecks and the situation in transit (13 out of 76) and information shared through social media (12 out of 76).** Findings were comparable between respondents with and without household members abroad. Some respondents (8 out of 76), all from households without migrants in the family, did not trust information shared via the media, as they felt even news items were designed purposely to discourage migration. Notably, relatives abroad were only cited by one respondent as a trusted information source. This echoes findings by a study conducted in October 2019 by REACH and MMC, which found that diaspora members in Europe felt disregarded as information source by community members at origin, as people at origin did not believe the stories of diaspora members' difficult lives in Europe.[117]

> *Returnees from my village, they told us about it, especially about the difficulties of the irregular route. I believe what they say, but I want to leave. The people in Europe, too, my friends there tell me how it's going, and even if they tell me how miserable they are there, I don't want to believe them.*
>
> Soninke man, from a household without members abroad, 23 years old.

Figure 19: Most trusted information sources reported

1	Returnees	37
2	Radio/ TV	13
3	Social media	12
4	Personal experience	6
5	Relatives abroad	3
6	Migrant deaths in the community	1
7	Do not know	13

Impact of information campaigns on migration decision-making

Respondents who had been exposed to information campaigns were asked about the extent to which these impacted their perception of and decision-making related to migration, including the mode of travel, be it regular or irregular.

Impact on community members' perception of migration

Respondents who had been exposed to information campaigns, but did not themselves consider migrating, were asked whether the campaigns impacted their perception of migration. **Of the 17 respondents, a slight majority held that the campaigns did nuance their perception of migration (9 out of 17).** The majority of them were women, who had previously been less exposed to information on migration (5 out of 9, all women who responded to this question). This was also echoed in two FGDs where participants held that information campaigns may make parents less likely to encourage migration.

> *I trust the information on the risks of irregular migration - all of it. […] But that hasn't changed how I see migration. To me, you still need to go and see it all by yourself.*
>
> Soninke man from a household with members abroad, 19 years old.

At the same time, respondents added that **this knowledge did not change anything in practice, as there was no viable alternative to migration for young men in Kayes**. Women in particular felt they had no decision-making power over the matter in the household (reported by 4 out of 5 women who responded to this question) and confirmed that this did not change the fact that respondents did not see viable alternatives to migration for youth (3 out of 9). Eight out of 17 community members interviewed held that the information shared did not change their perception. This was reportedly mainly because migration remained the only way to get out of poverty in the community and, although risky, respondents felt the that advantages still outnumbered the disadvantages.

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[117] REACH/MMC, Outspoken but unheard: How diasporas in Europe shape migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route, October 2019.

Impact on prospective migrants' decision to migrate

The majority of prospective migrants who had reportedly been exposed to an information campaign held that the campaign had had no influence on their decision to migrate (15 out of 18). Reasons given were that they already knew of the risks or that, either way, the risks did not scare them (9 out of 18); they felt that despite of the risks they needed to 'try their chance' (5 out of 18) and that they still felt migration was the only way to get out of poverty in their community (4 out of 18). The three community leaders whose community had reportedly been exposed to an information campaign agreed that these did not influence the youth's decision to migrate, as the youths wanted to have the same chance at building a better life and contributing to the community as their parents and grandparents did. FGDs with young men confirmed this view, as participants reported that, even though the journey was risky, they wanted to have their chance at succeeding. Three respondents (out of 18) who had previously considered irregular migration, said that, after the campaign, they started considering legal migration options.

Table 6: Primary reasons cited why information campaigns had reportedly no impact on prospective migrants' perception of migration

1	I already knew of the risks before attending the information campaign	9
2	I want to try, despite the risks	5
3	Migration is still the only way out of poverty	4

When asked about the extent to which other information sources had impacted respondents' decision-making on migration, the majority maintained that even there the impact had been limited (42 out of 43). Reasons given were comparable to the reasons cited in relation to the limited impact of information campaigns, notably that respondents felt there was no other option to succeeding in their community and that, either way, '*it is worth the risk*'. At the same time, 15 out of 43 respondents specified that the information shared through alternative information sources (notably news items and discussions with returnees) did increase their awareness about legal routes. Respondents reportedly preferred legal routes and/or air travel to the irregular journey, albeit noting that, in practice, these were not available to them due to a lack of funds and their inability to furnish the relevant documentation.[118]

> *If people continue to try, it's because not everyone dies [en route]. Otherwise people wouldn't go. But there is always some who do make it, who reach their destination. That means it's a question of luck, destiny. So those who are meant to survive will survive, no matter the risks.*
>
> FGD participant, young man, 24 years old

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[118] To note, respondents held that their chances of receiving regular travel visas to travel legally were so small that their awareness about legal routes reportedly did not change anything about their decision making over migration.

CONCLUSION

As Mali remains one of the primary countries of origin of refugees and migrants reaching Europe irregularly via sea, this study aimed at exploring the role of the so-called 'culture of migration'[119] in shaping migration aspirations towards Europe in the region of Kayes, the main area of origin of Malians in Europe. Building on legal migration patterns between Kayes and France dating back to the 1960s, Kayes has often been described as Mali's migration region *par excellence*, where migrants' contributions to the development of the region are pervasive. As migration from Mali to Europe has become increasingly restrictive over the past 20 years, the aim of this study was to explore the extent to which more restrictive policies have affected migration aspirations of prospective migrants in Kayes and the role, if any, of information campaigns in shaping such aspirations and the perception of migration in the region more broadly.

To what extent does the so-called 'culture of migration' still contribute today to migration aspirations in Kayes, Mali?

The study finds that the culture of migration in Kayes, which has been recorded in the region since the 1980s, is still omnipresent, and intensely shapes the local imaginary of success in the community:

- **Migration perceptions**: The vast majority of respondents had an extremely positive perception of migration, which reportedly originated from the economic advantages and social prestige migration brought, as well as a migrant's capacity to give back to the community and lift their family out of poverty. This perception was based on respondents' experiences and the investments migrants (present and of previous generations) had brought to the village of origin, in the form of schools, electricity networks, water pumps and the subsequent position of respect a migrant acquired in the local community.
- **Expectations & aspirations:** For young men (aged 18 – 30 years old) migration is seen as the norm, with community members expecting young men of the community to migrate one day (95/109) and the majority of young men reportedly aspiring to do so. As migration is perceived as the primary way out of poverty, staying is perceived as failure. Staying is only accepted if it is part of a larger household strategy whereby some members migrate while others stay to take care of the family's affairs, or in the rare cases where a household perceives itself as too vulnerable to invest in migration that may fail.

To what extent have EU and EU member states' increasingly restrictive migration policies in the past twenty years impacted and shaped migration dynamics within the assessed communities?

Restrictive migration policies have seemingly not changed migration aspirations of young men in Kayes, which remain mainly directed towards Europe. What has changed is the mode of travel, which has become predominantly irregular. This has led to an exacerbation of the vulnerability of the people of Kayes, be they migrants in transit, at destination, or their relatives in the community of origin.

- **In transit**: while in the past migration to Europe (mainly directed towards France), was legal, circular and short- to mid-term, migration from the region to Europe today has become almost solely irregular. This was found to be the case both for respondents with a migrant in the household and those without, illustrating how all people in Kayes have been affected by this. Migrants from the region embark predominantly on the perilous Saharan desert crossing and Mediterranean Sea journey to reach Europe and all respondents knew of members in the community who had died along this route.
- **At destination**: once in Europe, the increase in irregular travel has led to a rise of Kayesiens staying in an irregular situation, exposing them to exploitative labour practices and poor living conditions. In the past, Malians came to Europe through well-organised transnational networks which facilitated the (legal) arrival of an individual, their integration into the labour force and a safe living situation. The findings of this study suggest that even Kayesiens who have a strong network in Europe are vulnerable, frequently in an irregular situation and unable to earn a living.
- **At origin**: The heightened challenges for migrants in Europe and their inability to return home regularly, as they did in the past, has negatively impacted migrants' families who stayed behind. Households face long-term separation from their migrant family members abroad, long-term loss of labour force and greater dependency on migration as a primary source of income, which increases their vulnerability.

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[119] '*A phenomenon for which 'migration becomes the norm and staying the exception.'*', as defined in: Kandel, W. and D.S. Massey. *The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis*. Social Forces 80:981–1004, 2002.

What role does information shared through information campaigns play during the migration decision-making process?

Information campaigns were found to have a limited role in the decision-making process over migration among respondents in the region of Kayes. This was related to the following two factors:

- **Level of knowledge and trust towards information shared**: Respondents were generally aware of the risks of irregular migration, informed through the news, social networks, returnees originating from the village, as well through deaths of other youth who left their community for the '*aventure*' (adventure). Information campaigns on irregular migration were not *per se* mistrusted, however, respondents tended not to attach much meaning to them, since they echoed what they already knew in a context where the irregular route had *de facto* become the only route accessible to most aspiring migrants. Information on legal pathways and opportunities in Mali were generally disregarded, since they stood in stark contrast to respondents' own experiences, with legal routes reportedly *de facto* inaccessible to respondents.
- **Weighing potential risks versus tangible gains**: The advantages and riches migration *could* bring were so omnipresent and tangible in respondents' everyday lives that the imaginary of success far outweighed the dangers of the journey or the potentially harsh living conditions in Europe. The community-wide expectation towards young men to migrate meant that, while it was acceptable for a prospective migrant to fail during their journey, not wanting to migrate at all as a young man was frowned upon, illustrating the societal pressure to migrate. Migration was much more about the imaginary of being a migrant and supporting family and community back home, rather than the risks of the irregular journey or the challenges of life in Europe, putting into question the impact of information campaigns in such contexts.

Overall, the study illustrates that to understand present-day migration flows and to fully grasp how the policies of the past shape the realities of today, one needs to go back in history. The historical context may also provide important learnings for today: Malian migrants who went to France in the 1960s came with the intention to stay for a few years, earn money to support the family back home and return. Many of them did.

Today, young adults from Kayes still aspire to migrate. Many also have the intention to return to their village of origin - one of the reasons why they invest there - to build a life at home. However, these plans are disrupted by policies, which, rather than keeping people safe in their place, may give them no other option but to seek Europe through dangerous and irregular paths. As a result, Malian migrants stay in Europe, irregularly, at the expense of themselves, their communities of origin and in contradiction to what such restrictive migration policies were intended to achieve. All respondents felt that, without migration, escaping poverty is extremely challenging in Mali. Migration, a tradition built over centuries, has become the only way out.