



URBAN MIXED MIGRATION BAMAKO CASE STUDY

MMC Briefing Paper, November 2020



“Bamako is just a steppingstone because I was not able to go where I was trying to go. So, I found myself stuck here. Now, I am doing my best to return to Dakar but with the coronavirus the routes and the places are closed. Right now I am hearing that it is re-opening everywhere but I am waiting a little because I don't have money in my hands.”

Liberian woman, age unknown, Sotuba ACl

Front cover photo credit:

Thomas Brissiaud / Alamy Stock Photo, 2018

Acknowledgements

Researched and written by: Yéhiya Dicko and Jessamy Garver-Affeldt.

Reviewed by: Aurélia Donnard and Roberto Forin.

Special thanks: Francesco Coccoli and Ibrahima Sagne for 4Mi data analysis; and to the entire MMC/4Mi team in Mali for the implementation of 4Mi.

Layout and design: Ziad Alhemdi

Suggested citation: Mixed Migration Centre (2020), Urban Mixed Migration - Bamako case study, available at: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/urban-case-study-bamako/>

About this report

This report was commissioned and financed by the Ministère Français de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (MEAE) as part of a partnership with the International Centre for Policy Development (ICMPD) and a collaboration with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC). The MMC was responsible for data collection and wrote this report with the support of the ICMPD. The British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) supported the collection of a part of the data this study relies on.

This report is a contribution to the MMC's vision that migration policies, responses and public debate are based on credible evidence, nuanced understanding of mixed migration, placing human rights and protection of all people on the move at the centre. More specifically, it contributes to the second strategic objective of the MMC, which is to contribute to evidence-based and better-informed migration policies and debates.

After a brief overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in Bamako and the national migration policy framework, this case study seeks to explore mixed migration dynamics from three complementary thematic lenses: 1) Bamako as a city of opportunities; 2) Bamako as a city of risks and 3) Bamako during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Besides the case study included in this report, MMC has carried out similar urban case studies in Bogota, Kuala Lumpur, Nairobi and Tunis. The research methods, data sources and analysis structure have been aligned across all case studies, to allow the reader to draw comparisons between the specific situation of refugees and migrants across cities.

The other case studies can be found here:

[Urban case study in Bogota](#)

[Urban case study in Nairobi](#)

[Urban case study in Kuala Lumpur](#)

[Urban case study in Tunis](#)

Also, the 2020 edition of the MMC annual report, the Mixed Migration Review, is dedicated to the theme of urban migration and can be found here:

[Mixed Migration Review 2020](#)

The information and views set out in this report are those of the author and the MMC and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) or any of the donors supporting the work of MMC or this report. Responsibility for the content of this report lies entirely with the MMC.

About MMC

The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs (Asia, East Africa & Yemen, Europe, Middle East, North Africa, West Africa and Latin America & Caribbean) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source of 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). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

For more information on MMC visit our website:
www.mixedmigration.org

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY:



COMMISSIONED BY:



IN COLLABORATION WITH:



SUPPORTED BY:



About MEAE

The Migration And Development Team of the Ministère Français de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (MEAE) works to promote a balanced vision of migration, based on the protection of human rights, the need for effective migration management systems and the mobilisation of the diaspora for development. Aware of the importance of migrants' ability to be active within host and transit countries as well as countries of origin, France has developed guidelines on migration and development, which are the focus of a Mobility, Migration and Development strategy aimed at strengthening the contribution of mobility and migration to the development of the countries of origin.

About ICMPD

The ICMPD is an international organisation with 18 Member States and over 340 staff members. It advises and supports its Member States and partners by building evidence-driven migration policy options and governance systems to equip them with effective, forward-leaning responses to opportunities and pragmatic solutions to complex regional migration and mobility challenges. Priority regions include Africa, Central and South Asia, Europe and the Middle East. The ICMPD implements the Secretariat of the Rabat Process (Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development), an intergovernmental migration dialogue which brings together countries of origin, transit, and destination along the migration routes linking Central, West, and Northern Africa with Europe in order to address migration and development issues, guided by the principles of solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility. The Rabat Process is funded by the European Union in the framework of the Migration and Mobility Dialogue support project.

Contents

03	Acknowledgements
06	Glossary
07	Tables and figures
08	Key findings
10	Introduction
11	Methodology
13	Migration dynamics in Bamako
15	Migration policy landscape
16	Bamako, migration and opportunities
17	Bamako, migration and risks
20	Bamako, migration and COVID-19
23	Conclusions and recommendations
24	Annex - Interviews conducted

Glossary

4Mi	Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative
AME	Association Malienne des Expulsés (Malian Association for Deported)
ARACEM	Association des Refoulés de l'Afrique Centrale au Mali (Association of Central African Refouled in Mali)
CIGEM	Centre d'Information et de Gestion des Migrations (Center for Migration Management and Information)
CREDD	Cadre Stratégique Pour la Relance Économique et le Développement Durable (Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development)
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DNDS	Direction Nationale du Développement Social (National Directorate of Social Development)
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Dialogue
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
MME	Ministère des maliens de l'extérieur (Ministry for Malians Abroad)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PONAM	Politique Nationale de Migration (National Migration Policy)
PSS	Psychosocial Support
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Tables and figures

Figure 1: Bamako - Map of the main areas of interest in the study	11
Figure 2: Qualitative data collection overview	12
Figure 3: Qualitative data collection overview	12
Figure 4: Stopping in Bamako	13
Figure 5: Protection incidents by perpetrator	18
Figure 6: Pandemic situation improving or not?	20
Figure 7: Lost income during the pandemic	21
Figure 8: How have migration plans changed?	22

ANNEXES

Table 1: Key Informant Interviews	24
Table 2: Refugee and Migrant Interviews	24

Key findings – Bamako

Migration dynamics in Bamako

- Bamako is emphasised first and foremost to be a city of transit, but is also a destination in its own right and a city of return.
- The distinction between transit and destination is not always clear-cut, as also those who do not intend Bamako to be their destination may end up having a protracted stay.

Migration policy landscape in Mali

- Mali's National Migration Policy (PONAM) is formulated primarily to safeguard and expand migration opportunities related to the migration of Malian citizens, and to leverage their contributions for development. While some aspects of the policy do account for migration of foreigners to Mali, attracting them and incorporating them into the development of the country does not appear to be an objective of the policy. The same is true of Mali's Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (CREDD).
- Although PONAM and CREDD both emphasise the importance of remittances and development contributions on the part of diaspora, it appears that this is still an area that could benefit from elaboration of concrete policies and programs.

Bamako, migration and opportunities

- Some specific professions in which migrants bring expertise to Bamako include: car mechanics, electricians, heavy equipment operators (primarily for mining), opticians, woodworkers, practitioners of traditional medicine, dressmakers and IT specialists.
- A favorable exchange rate with certain neighbouring countries (Guinea, Mauritania) and a reasonable cost of living are seen as facilitating savings on the part of refugees and migrants.
- Given that Bamako is the capital and largest city in Mali, there is a particular concentration of organisms (state structures, civil society, NGOs and international organisations) which can support *expulsés* and *migrants de retour* with reception, accommodation, orientation and legal, administrative, social and medical assistance. Diaspora and the remittances they contribute provide opportunities for Bamako and for Mali more broadly. They support the basic needs and improve the quality of life of families (increasing access to health and education etc.), finance investments for the wider community (construction of dams, mosques, schools, health centres, etc.), enhance human capital through new skills and knowledge and generate employment opportunities.

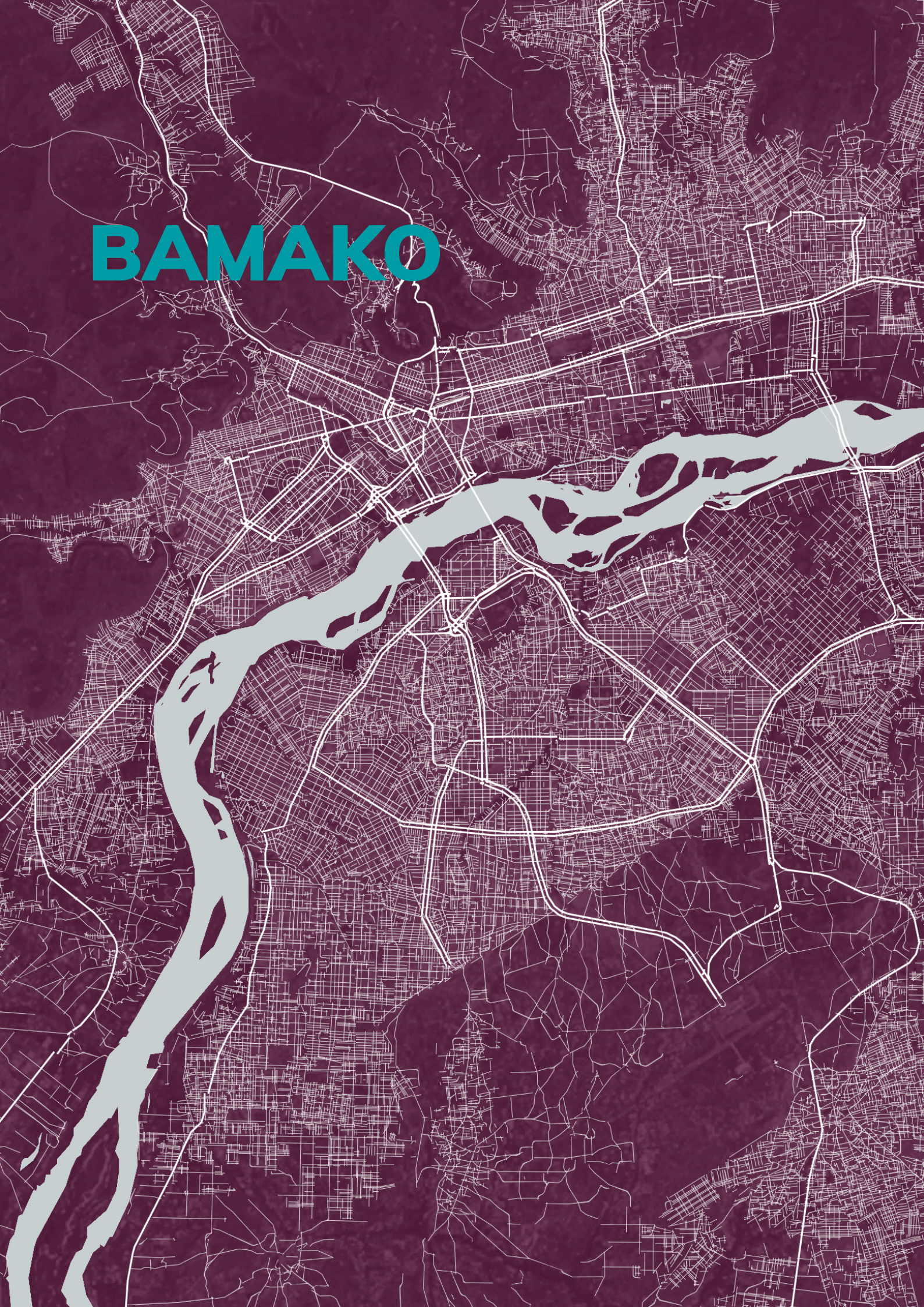
Bamako, migration and risks

- According to 4Mi data, extortion is the protection incident reported to have taken place in Bamako by the highest proportion of respondents (57%). It is followed by physical abuse (16%), detention (11%), robbery (8%), witnessing or experiencing sexual assault or harassment (5%), witnessing migrant death (2%), and kidnapping (1%).
- Security forces/police/military are the category of actors alleged to have perpetrated the highest number of three types of protection incident: detention (99%), physical abuse (81%) and sexual assault/harassment (43%). Single unknown individuals are frequently cited in cases of death (47%), robbery (43%) and kidnapping (47%). Groups of thugs and criminal gangs are also prominent among reported perpetrators for the latter two incidents (30% and 27% respectively).
- Key informants and migrant respondents tend to emphasise socioeconomic risks faced by refugees and migrants in Bamako over risks associated with violence and aggression. Migrant respondents seemingly found assistance to be fairly readily available in the city.

Bamako, migration and COVID-19

- According to 4Mi COVID-19 data, 79% of refugees and migrants interviewed in Bamako said that they could access health services if they exhibited symptoms of COVID-19.
- 4Mi COVID-19 data suggests that loss of income in the context of the pandemic is concentrated among female refugees and migrants; for the data collected in Bamako in July 2020, all respondents who reported a loss of income were women.
- Almost half of 4Mi respondents in Bamako (48%) reported that in the face of the pandemic, they had decided to stay where they were for longer. In every other location in Mali where respondents were surveyed, this percentage was substantially lower. This may be seen to dovetail with other findings which point to Bamako's relatively welcoming nature and accessibility of assistance.

BAMAKO



1. Introduction

Bamako is an important city of transit, destination and return for refugees and migrants in West Africa. After a brief overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in the city and the national migration policy framework this case study seeks to explore mixed migration dynamics in Bamako from three complementary thematic lenses: **1) Bamako as a city of opportunities; 2) Bamako as city of risks and 3) Bamako during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Bamako, migration and opportunities

The largest concentration of foreigners in Mali is found in Bamako. It is also the main destination for internal rural to urban migration, and is an important location for *expulsés* and *migrants de retour*. This case study aims to better understand whether and to what extent Bamako is seen as a **city of opportunity**, and by whom, as well as what **opportunities migration can provide for Bamako**, particularly related to development. It examines the contributions of refugees and migrants to the city, and highlights what the city can give back to these groups. Given the importance of emigration of Malians abroad and their impact on Mali's economy and society, it also looks at the role of diaspora and remittances in Bamako's development, doing so against the backdrop of Mali's National Migration Policy (PONAM).

Bamako, migration and risks

While Bamako may not be seen as a **"risky city"** in the same vein as cities further north in Mali (for instance Mopti and Gao), where prevailing insecurity is much greater, MMC 4Mi data has nonetheless indicated that a substantial number of protection incidents occur there. The case study draws on this data to provide an overview of the types of protection incidents that are prevalent in Bamako, and who is reportedly responsible, while at the same time seeking to better understand perceptions of risk on the part of migrant respondents¹ and key informants in the city. It also looks to assess what opportunities are open to people on the move to receive support and assistance if they need it.

Bamako, migration and COVID-19

Linked to the above, to understand both risks and opportunity in the current moment, it is important to take into consideration the **effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and migrants** in Bamako. Bamako was where the majority of cases in Mali were concentrated, at least in the initial months of the pandemic, and government measures to seek to curb the spread of the virus clearly caused disruptions in terms of free movement and for the economy and livelihoods.² As a population that may be seen as particularly vulnerable to these disruptions, this case study seeks to gauge how the pandemic has affected the daily lives and migration trajectories of refugees and migrants, as well as to understand to what extent they have been able to access assistance in the face of the pandemic.

1 The term "migrant respondents" is used to differentiate this group from the second group of key informants (whose affiliations will be specified when and where possible given that some preferred their affiliation to remain anonymous) and from 4Mi survey respondents.

2 Africanews (2020, 8 May). [Coronavirus - Mali: Michel H. Sidibé Ministre de la Santé et des Affaires Sociales : « Le Mali a un taux de Guérison D'environ 42% Contre 33% pour le Continent Africain »](#).

2. Methodology

To explore the three axes of this study, MMC uses a mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative data

MMC's 4Mi core survey provides primary quantitative data on mixed migration dynamics, including individual profiles, migration drivers, intentions and aspirations, conditions and means of travel, smuggler economics, and destination choices. In this case study, data from the 4Mi core survey (herein referred to as "4Mi data") is used to shed light on protection incidents 4Mi respondents indicate took place in Bamako during the period February 2019-January 2020, as well as those reportedly responsible for them.

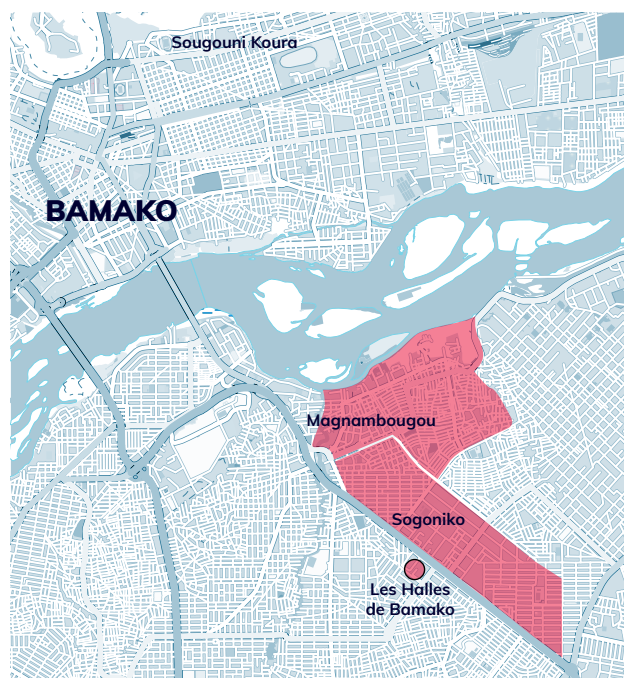
What is the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi)?

Set up in 2014, 4Mi is a unique network of field monitors situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs. It aims to offer a regular, standardised, quantitative and globalised, system of collecting primary data on mixed migration. 4Mi predominantly uses a closed question survey to invite respondents to anonymously self-report on a wide range of issues that results in extensive data relating to individual profiles, migratory drivers, means and conditions of movement, the smuggler economy, aspirations and destination choices. 4Mi data allow MMC and its partners to inform migration policies, debates, and protection responses for people on the move through the production of high-quality quantitative analysis grounded in evidence.

Starting in April 2020, the 4Mi core survey was adapted to include a focus on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first phase of the project (April to June) looked at the immediate impact of the pandemic on refugees and migrants with respondents being asked about their awareness of the illness and how to protect themselves, access to health services, needs and assistance received, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods and migration journeys. The second phase (July to date) looks at the more medium/longer term impact of the pandemic on mixed migration dynamics, namely of migration drivers, smuggling, protection risks and intended destinations. In this case study data from the 4Mi COVID-19 survey (herein referred to as the "4Mi COVID-19 data") is used to gauge how refugees and migrants in Bamako have been affected by the pandemic and government response measures.

Both surveys (4Mi core survey and 4Mi COVID-19

Figure 1: Bamako - Map of the main areas of interest in the study

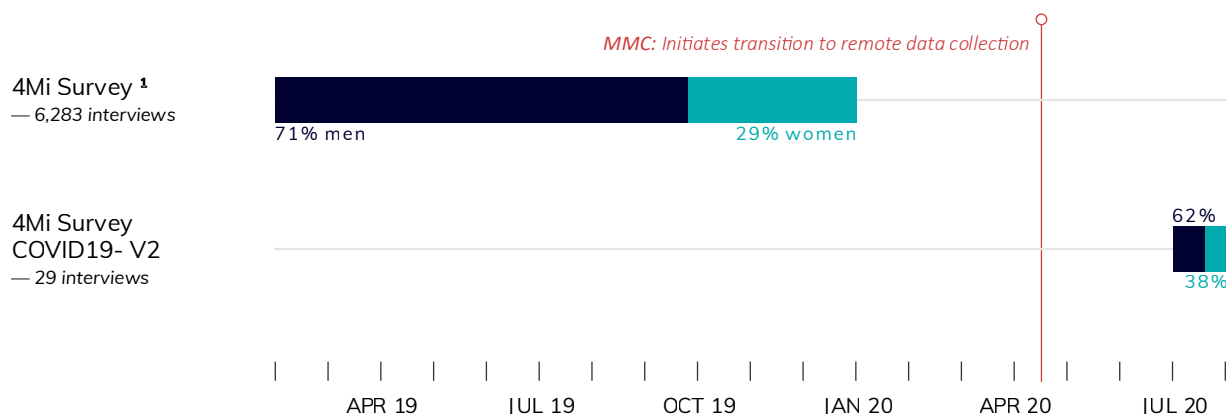


survey) follow the same sampling scheme, which includes refugees and migrants who are: 18 years' old and above who have been in Burkina Faso, Mali or Niger for less than one year at the time of interview (or in the case of the 4Mi COVID-19 data used in this case study, in Bamako specifically). The latter criterion allows for an emphasis on people who are moving longer distances along mixed migration routes as well as people who are actively on the move, rather than settled refugee and migrant populations.

Given the moderate sample sizes and non-randomised nature of sampling, the findings from the quantitative data should be treated with caution and should not be considered to represent the entire refugee and migrant population in Bamako. Additionally, the responses of survey participants in the 4Mi survey cannot be independently verified, and response bias may be a factor. Nonetheless, the findings from the survey can provide important insights into the current situation refugees and migrants are facing in Bamako. Informed consent and anonymity were communicated clearly with participants before, during, and after the interviews.

4Mi data is not typically collected in Bamako, thus a specific data collection exercise was carried out in the city as of July 2020. Despite effort to quickly scale up data collection the total sample for the COVID-19 specific survey is relatively small (n=29). However, it can provide a snapshot of the situation faced by refugees and migrants in Bamako during the month of July.

Figure 2: Quantitative data collection overview



¹ While 4Mi data does not allow a definitive calculation of all respondents who passed through Bamako, out of this larger sample we can nonetheless identify those who reported experiencing or witnessing a protection incident in Bamako, as well as those who reported stopping there for a significant period of time.

Qualitative Data

In addition to this quantitative information, MMC conducted qualitative interviews with two groups of key informants: (i) 10 in depth interviews with mixed migration actors (government, NGOs, civil society organisations, *transporteurs*), and (ii) 6 in depth interviews with migrants in Bamako.⁴ The sampling of this latter group aimed at diversity in terms of gender and country of origin, and it also sought to include both migrants in migrant shelters⁵ and those outside. The nationalities and genders of the migrants ultimately interviewed were Guinean (3 males), Beninese (1 male), Cameroonian (1 female), Liberian (1 female). Informed consent was communicated clearly with participants before, during, and after the interviews. When requested

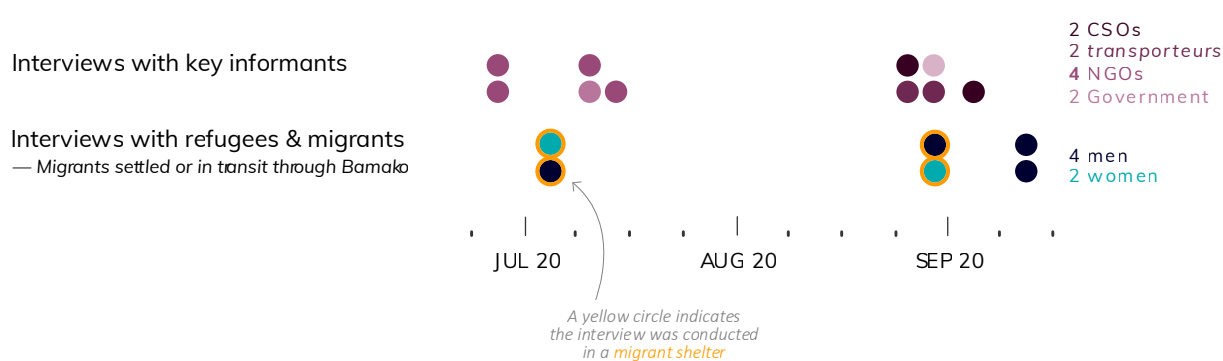
information has been verified with participants prior to publishing and carefully anonymised.

The qualitative data collection took place from June through September 2020.⁶

Secondary sources

Secondary sources were referred to, primarily to provide information on migratory dynamics in Bamako and Mali, Malian government policy, and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included media reports, government documents, gray literature and operational dashboards from NGOs and international organisations.

Figure 3: Qualitative data collection overview



³ While 4Mi data does not allow a definitive calculation of all respondents who passed through Bamako, out of this larger sample we can nonetheless identify those who reported experiencing or witnessing a protection incident in Bamako, as well as those who reported stopping there for a significant period of time.

⁴ Note this group is referred to as “migrant respondents” to differentiate them from other key informants (whose affiliations will be specified when and where possible given that some preferred their affiliation to remain anonymous) and from 4Mi survey respondents.

⁵ Known as centres d'accueil, these are places where refugees and migrants can access accommodation and other services. Three respondents (2 NGO and 1 CSO) were associated with these shelters.

⁶ A coup took place in Mali on 18 August 2020. When probed specifically about the effects of the coup on migration, one of the two key informants interviewed after the coup said the following: “The situation will affect everyone, not only migrants, because when you are on the territory you cannot escape the impact of this situation. It’s been 2 months that even Malians could not work or circulate properly with the demonstrations. The coup d’état will affect everyone, it will take time for the administration to restart and they will also feel the shock.” However, the four migrant respondents interviewed after the coup did not mention the coup or demonstrations in responding to the standard interview questions.

3. Migration dynamics in Bamako

Bamako as transit hub

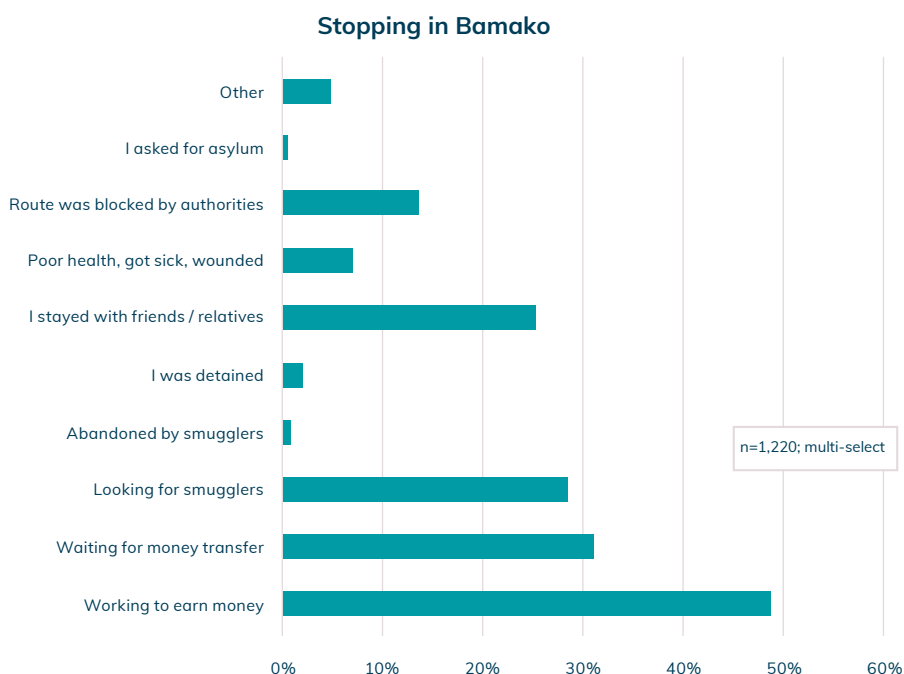
IOM’s DTM dashboards note that “the capital city of Bamako is a major transit point for migrants travelling to West and North African countries,”⁷ with some of these ultimately seeking to travel onward to Europe.⁸ Bamako is a place where one can find information and make connections for onward travel, including by linking to smuggling networks. To paraphrase the perspective of a key informant from the Association of Central African Refoulés in Mali (*Association des Refoulés de l’Afrique Centrale au Mali – ARACEM*), many West and Central Africans don’t necessarily want to go to Bamako particularly, but they want to go to Europe or the Maghreb, and they need to pass through Mali or Niger to do so. These days, due to cooperation between Niger and the EU perceived as deterring migration, it is considered “easier” to pass through Mali.

This orientation – that of Bamako as a city of transit – is echoed by key informants and migrant respondents. When migrant respondents were asked whether they wished to stay in Bamako in the longer term or whether it is just a stepping stone on their journey, only one, a female Cameroonian, indicated that she wanted to stay in Bamako for the long term, saying that she felt at

ease there. In contrast, a female Liberian stated “Many foreigners come here but when they come, they don’t stay in Bamako. They only come here as a transit point. When they have enough money, they go elsewhere to another country.” 4Mi COVID-19 data showed that of the 29 respondents interviewed in Bamako in July, only one stated Mali to be their intended destination.

Multiple key informants mentioned the importance of temporary work while in Bamako in order to gain money for an onward or return journey, and one specified that it is easier find temporary work in Bamako than in cities further north such as Gao or Kidal. All migrant respondents who had been in the city for longer than a few days and who were not caring for small children indicated that they were working and that they had intentions to move onward, either back to their country of origin or onward towards Europe. 4Mi data supported this; of respondents who indicated that they had stopped in Bamako, the highest proportion said they did so to work to “earn money for next stretch of the journey” (49%, 599/1220).

Figure 4: Stopping in Bamako



7 IOM (May 2020). [Flow Monitoring Report – Mali – Dashboard 52](#).

8 IOM (2016, 1-15 November). [Mali Migratory Flow Monitoring Points Situation Report in Gao and Benena](#).

Bamako as destination of internal and international mobility⁹

Transit emphasis notwithstanding, Bamako, a city of some 3.5 million, is a destination in its own right.¹⁰ Along with its neighbouring commune of Koulikoro, it was the only net recipient of migrants according to Mali's 2009 census.¹¹

While Bamako may not be seen as a pole for international migration within West Africa in the same way as Abidjan or Dakar,¹² it is to some extent a destination city for migrants from other countries in West Africa, particularly in the service sector (domestic work, car cleaning, hotels, maquis), tourism or in the commercial sector (shops, markets).¹³ Key informants also mentioned work in more technical sectors, such as IT or optometry. Specific nationalities are often associated with particular fields of work. For example, Togolese are known for construction, Mauritians for trading, Nigerians for IT, and Senegalese for couture and tailoring.

However, it may not always be easy to make a clear-cut distinction between Mali as a destination and transit country. One key informant working with the Centre for Migration Management and Information (*Centre d'Information et de Gestion des Migrations – CIGEM*) spoke of refugees and migrants in protracted situations of transit, staying for six months to a year to work before continuing their journey. He indicated that this is particularly the case for people from countries which do not require a visa (ECOWAS citizens). This is supported by the migrant respondents: four out of the six interviewed stated that they had been in Bamako for periods between six months and a year despite the fact that they were ultimately looking for opportunities to move on. Thus, while their intention is to be in transit, this does not seem to be their reality.

Bamako is also an important destination for internal migration, particularly for rural to urban migration, which according to key informants typically involves young people and follows a seasonal, circular pattern. After the harvest these young internal migrants will come to Bamako to find paid work, returning to their villages at the time of the rainy season. A further pattern is that of young women coming to Bamako, frequently to do domestic work, who may then return to their villages

at the time of their marriage. Another specific group of internal migrants are talibés, the young boys who are sent by their families to stay with Koranic masters, many of whom are concentrated in Bamako, or who move between Bamako and their village. *Talibés* from Burkina Faso and Mali may also pass through Bamako on their way to Senegal.

Bamako as city of return

Bamako is also an important location for *expulsés* (migrants who have been forcibly expelled from a country)¹⁴ and *migrants de retour*, those who are making a return journey of their own volition. These may be non-Malians or Malians for whom Bamako is either a transit point or who opt to stay there for the longer term. These groups were mentioned by multiple key informants, particularly in terms of access to services and their need for psychosocial support. The salience of this issue is also recognised by the Malian government, which acknowledges in its National Migration Policy (*Politique Nationale de Migration – PONAM*) that between 2002 and 2014 some 91,033 Malian migrants were returned involuntarily to their country,¹⁵ and aims to support their transport, housing, access to health and psycho-social assistance as well as reinsertion.

According to a key informant who works with the Malian Association for Deportedees (*Association Malienne des Expulsés – AME*), there are many reasons that *expulsés* and *migrants de retour* opt to stay in Bamako. There can be a logistical element, given the fact that Bamako is a major transport hub, and many *expulsés* are deported directly there. There is also support and opportunity available in Bamako that may not be found elsewhere in the country, given Bamako's status as the country's economic engine, and the presence of state structures and organisations of support that can help receive *expulsés*. Given the fact that at least until recently expulsions have been seen in Malian society as a "curse," *expulsés* may prefer to remain in Bamako even if that is not where they originate from, as "they are afraid and ashamed to return to their homes with empty hands." This may also apply to *migrants de retour* whose migration project did not succeed as hoped.

9 As conflict has been a prevailing element of the Malian context – and increasingly that of the wider region – dating back to 2012, Bamako is home to several thousand forcibly displaced. While not a specific focus of this case study, as of June 2020, Bamako hosted some 3,107 internally displaced persons according to IOM and the Malian Direction Nationale du Développement Social (DNDS). According to UNHCR, as of 31 July 2020, there were an estimated 2,967 refugees registered in Bamako.

10 Campbell, J. (2018, 12 September). [Africa is the Fastest Urbanizing Place on the Planet](#) Council on Foreign Relations.

11 World Bank Group (2019). [Bamako: An Engine of Growth and Service Delivery](#).

12 Beauchemin, C & Bocquier, P. (2004, October) [Migration and Urbanisation in Francophone West Africa: An Overview of the Recent Empirical Evidence](#). *Urban Studies* 41(11): 2245-2272.

13 Mixed Migration Centre & Save the Children (2018, February). [Young and on the move in West Africa](#).

14 Also sometimes referred to as *migrants de retour involontaire/forcé* (forced or involuntary return migrants), *expulsé* is used throughout to assist clarity.

15 A more recent dynamic that is also important to highlight is that of expulsions from Algeria to Mali, which have been denounced by organisations like [Human Rights Watch](#), as well as regularly in the press "for their massive, sudden character and lack of humanity."

4. Migration policy landscape

Mali's National Migration Policy (PONAM)

Mali has a National Migration Policy (*Politique Nationale de Migration*, or PONAM) which was developed under the auspices of the Ministry for Malians Abroad (*Ministère des maliens de l'extérieur – MME*) and adopted by the Government of Mali on 3 September 2014.¹⁶ The Policy has eight principle axes: protect and secure migrants; organise and facilitate legal migration; support for a better reintegration of *migrants de retour*;¹⁷ enhance the capacities of the diaspora for national development; build the capacity of migrant organisations and civil society; aim at a better strategic positioning of Mali on migration issues; improvement of knowledge on migration; and readjustment of conditions of entry, stay and establishment in Mali. It is important to note that with a few exceptions, notably Axis 8 (readjustment of conditions of entry, stay and establishment in Mali), the document is formulated to focus primarily on Malian migrants – current and potential migrants, diaspora, *migrants de retour* and *expulsés* etc.¹⁸

Axis 8 of PONAM, which has the most explicit orientation towards migration of foreigners into Mali is based heavily in the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol, which extends rights of entry, residence and establishment to citizens of ECOWAS member countries (which includes Mali).¹⁹ One of the elements envisaged for the implementation of PONAM's Axis 8 is to seek to better inform migrants about their rights of free circulation, including by illustrating and translating the Protocol into the six languages of the border regions. Implementation of Axis 8 also seeks to “regulate and rationally control immigration flows,” in part by identifying communities of foreigners and supporting their socio-economic integration and by “rationalising immigration flows at the level of mining sites,” including through regulating access to sites, sensitising the populations regarding risks and countering insecurity and “degradation of morals.” This seems to leave the door open for a constrained interpretation of the ECOWAS protocols, and overall it does not appear that even the Axis most geared towards migration into and through Mali is meant to encourage this phenomenon.²⁰

In speaking of PONAM, one key informant working with a migration and development NGO called it “well-defined” and “consensual,” highlighting the fact that key actors (including his organisation) had been “consulted from the outset.” A key informant from CIGEM stated his belief that

the policy “takes into account all aspects of migration,” and supports assistance to migrants. He highlighted the role played by associations of *expulsés/migrants de retour* in bringing the experience of Malian migrants and *expulsés* to the attention of policy-makers, and said that these organisations essentially acted as “pressure groups on decision-makers.” The implementation of PONAM is to be supported by a five-year Plan of Action currently under development by the MME.

Mali's Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (CREDD)

Migration is also included in Mali's Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (*Cadre Stratégique Pour la Relance Économique et le Développement Durable – CREDD 2019-2023*). One of its overall objectives is to “Better manage demographic growth and migration in order to contribute to poverty reduction and the sustainable development of the country.” The CREDD particularly seeks to achieve this objective through “mobilising and enhancing the contributions of diaspora in order to reduce poverty and support development,” and “establishing an appropriate management system for migration issues.” The former clearly echoes PONAM's objective of leveraging diaspora contributions, and the latter further emphasises the priority that the Government of Mali places on supporting Malians abroad, increasing legal migration opportunities and supporting the reintegration of Malian returnees. It notably does not make any mention of migration from outside of Mali.²¹

International and regional regimes for migration and displacement

In addition to national policy frameworks, Mali has ratified various international and regional conventions and protocols governing migration and displacement. These include the 1951 Refugee Convention, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, and 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness.²² Additionally, Mali has ratified the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in West Africa²³ and the ECOWAS Protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment.²⁴

16 Ministère des Maliens de l'Extérieur (MME) (2014, September). *Politique Nationale de Migration*.

17 In PONAM, the term *migrants de retour* also encompasses *expulsés*.

18 MME. Op Cit.

19 Adepoju, A., Boulton, A. & Levin, M. (2010). [Promoting integration through mobility: Free movement under ECOWAS](#). *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 29 (3): 120-144.

20 MME. Op Cit.

21 Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances, Cellule Technique CSLP, UNDP (2019, May). [Cadre Stratégique Pour la Relance Économique et le Développement Durable – CREDD 2019-2023](#).

22 IOM (2018, May) [Profil de gouvernance de la migration : la République du Mali](#).

23 [OAU Convention: Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa](#)

24 Adepoju, A. et al. Op Cit.

5. Bamako, migration and opportunities

When asked specifically whether migration is an opportunity for the city of Bamako and if and whether it can contribute to development, the answers of key informants were positive, and centered around financial and human capital contributed to Bamako both by migrants who have come from other countries and diaspora Malians. At the same time, conversations with both key informants and migrant respondents also highlighted the ways in which Bamako can be a place of opportunity for refugees and migrants, as well as *expulsés* and *migrants de retour*.

What can migration bring to Bamako?

A 2017 Migration Profile by the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance indicated that while the 2009 census showed that the largest concentration of foreigners in Mali were found in Bamako (27.9%), their impact on the Malian economy was essentially impossible to determine, presumably because the majority are working in Mali's substantial informal sector.²⁵ Nonetheless, key informants did point to ways in which they saw migrants adding value to Bamako, for instance through an infusion of low-cost labour or support to the tax base. According to one key informant, "migrants in trade pay their taxes and therefore contribute to the development of the country."

Another important benefit that they are seen as bringing to Bamako is a diversification and specialisation in terms of skills. Some specific professions in which migrants were seen to bring expertise to Bamako included: car mechanics, electricians, heavy equipment operators (primarily for mining), opticians, woodworkers, practitioners of traditional medicine, dressmakers and IT specialists. The contribution of migrants to the construction industry was mentioned multiple times, with Togolese singled out particularly, but Beninese and Burkinabés highlighted as well.

One example of a specific skill contributed and shared by migrants is tile-laying, at which Togolese were reported to excel. According to a key informant working for the government, this is a skill that young people are keen to learn given the construction boom in Bamako. "Migrants were able to transmit skills in a field that was not very well known. Migrants have enabled some work. They created the craze."

What opportunities does Bamako afford refugees and migrants?

Not only can refugees and migrants contribute to the development of the city of Bamako, but the city can also provide opportunity for them. According to PONAM, Mali is a "country of legendary hospitality and great

tolerance," and conversations with key informants and migrant respondents alike painted a picture of Bamako as a hospitable place, with one key informant expressing that in Malian culture, "the stranger is king." No migrant respondent reported experiencing discrimination, and in fact most mentioned experiences to the contrary, for instance saying, "I have made friends with people from Bamako" and "the positive aspects of this city are the peace and friendliness of the people" (male migrant from Guinea). According to a female migrant respondent from Liberia, "When I go to the mosque those people that are there, they are all God's people so they are my people too." The fact that in general refugees and migrants seem able to live in Bamako without feeling unwelcome or discriminated against could be seen as providing the basic conditions which allow them to take advantage of whatever additional opportunities the city may offer them.

In addition to opportunities for employment discussed above, several key informants and migrant respondents mentioned the possibility Bamako presented for saving money, pointing to a somewhat lower cost of living and to favorable exchange rates vis-à-vis the Guinean and Mauritanian currencies in particular. One migrant respondent stated that for her a major advantage of Bamako was that it was easy to get assistance from organisations. She went on to say that "Here in Bamako, to get a place to sleep is easy and cheap. People do things for Allah's sake. It is a more traditional society." Additionally, Malian documentation was mentioned by a key informant from CIGEM as being attractive to non-Malians, as it can "open doors" along the journey due to accords with Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia allowing for visa-free travel.

The city was also seen as presenting opportunities for *expulsés* and *migrants de retour*. While benefiting from the wider economic opportunities in Bamako, a key informant who works with these groups (AME) pointed out that they can also benefit from training opportunities in Bamako and from the assistance of various migrant support structures. Given that Bamako is the capital and largest city in Mali, there is a particular concentration of organisms (state structures, civil society, NGOs and international organisations) which can support *expulsés* and *migrants de retour* with reception, accommodation, orientation and legal, administrative, social and medical assistance. In terms of training, the focus tends to be on income generating activities, such as soap making and food processing, as well as further capacity building for those who already possess some qualifications in trades such as catering, masonry, metal and wood carpentry, etc.

²⁵ Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (2017, October). [Mali Migration Profile: Study on Migration Routes in West and Central Africa](#).

What can emigration contribute to Bamako?

One of the four specific objectives of PONAM is “to mobilise and enhance the contributions of the diaspora to reduce poverty and support national development,” an aim that is also echoed in the CREDD, which points out that “close to 4 million Malians live abroad.” Government numbers put formal remittances totals at 485 billion CFA (euro 739,378,000 at today’s rate) in 2018, and a key informant stated his belief that informal transfers were at least that great if not greater.

Given the magnitude of remittances, it is not surprising that the Government of Mali places an emphasis on harnessing them productively. However, when key informants were asked if they knew of local initiatives to do so, none of them gave specific examples, and one said that nothing formal in this regard existed at the state level. In spite of this, several key informants pointed to diaspora and remittances as an opportunity for Bamako and for Mali more broadly, in terms of supporting their families (improving quality of life and access to health and education), making investments to the wider community (construction of dams, mosques, schools, health centers,

etc.), enhancing human capital through new skills and knowledge and in generating employment opportunities.

Diaspora are seen as investing in real estate and construction, which helps expand the labour market in Bamako. According to one key informant, “there are several billionaire former migrants in Mali, including major job creators.” Another key informant saw Malian emigrants as “learning new things and becoming experts in their field.” They are also seen as contributing to development of small and medium enterprises and industries for local products, the creation of modern poultry farms and the establishment of modern garages, etc.

Despite these positive contributions, a key informant working for a migration and development NGO sounded a note of caution. While highlighting the importance of funds transferred by the diaspora, he observed that “the cases of (migration) failures are more and more noted, a reality which should therefore be considered. That said, there are always departures and many young people are potential migrants.”

6. Bamako, migration and risks

Safety and security in Bamako

In general key informants and migrant respondents did not speak of major security concerns in Bamako. According to one key informant from ARACEM who works in a migrant shelter, “usually the migrants speak of problems they have had before arriving in Bamako,” often related to their experiences passing through checkpoints. Several key informants stated specifically that they did not see things like violence, physical abuse or aggression to be major issues for refugees and migrants in the city. All migrant respondents interviewed in migrant shelters stated that they felt safe. Those migrants who were interviewed outside of shelters spoke in general terms about risks related to protection, not indicating that they had personally been victims. According to a male Guinean migrant respondent who is sleeping at a bus station, “security varies according to the vulnerability of the person concerned, a (migrant) without fixed domicile may be safe but not secure; migrants who do not have accommodation can generally be victims or witnesses of several protection or security incidents.”

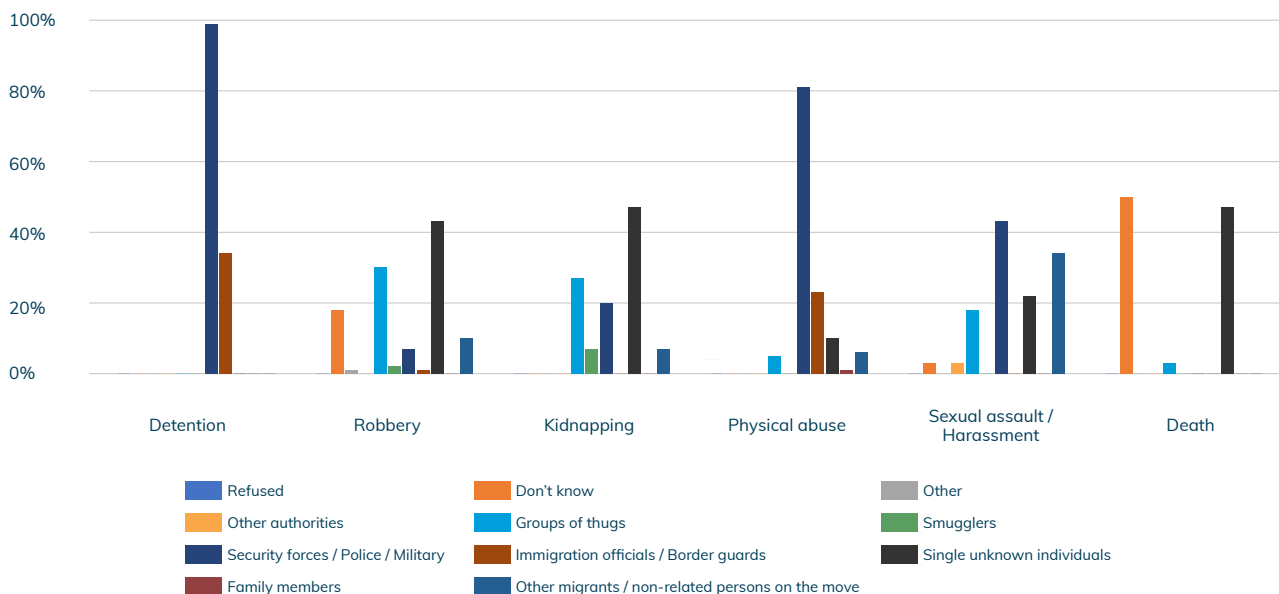
Data from the 4Mi core survey collected between February 2019 and January 2020 shows that extortion is the protection incident reported as occurring in Bamako by the highest percentage of respondents by a substantial margin (57% of respondents reporting incidents; 799/1394). Other categories of protection

incident were reported as taking place in Bamako in much smaller proportions. Key informants considered violence and aggression against refugees and migrants to be rare, and indeed physical abuse was reported by a much smaller percentage of respondents (16%, 216/1394), though this was nonetheless the second most reported incident. This was followed by detention (11%, 160/1394), robbery (8%, 107/1394), witnessing or experiencing sexual assault/harassment (5%, 65/1394), witnessing migrant death (2%, 32/1394) and kidnapping (1%, 15/1394).

The nationality that reported the highest percentage of incidents across all categories – often by a substantial margin – was Guineans (witnessing deaths – 41%, 13/32; witnessing or experiencing sexual assault/harassment – 52%, 34/65; physical abuse/harassment – 33%, 71/216; kidnapping – 53%, 8/15; robbery – 39%, 42/107; extortion – 33%, 265/799; detention – 29%, 46/160). Guineans made up 34% (319/942) of the respondents reporting protection incidents in Bamako, thus there were multiple protection incidents that they reported experiencing or witnessing at a disproportionately high rate (kidnapping, sexual assault/harassment, witnessing deaths, robbery).

In terms of who was reportedly responsible for these incidents that took place in Bamako, security forces/police/military were the actor singled out more than

Figure 5: Protection incidents by perpetrator (multi-select)



any other across three categories of protection incident. These were detention, physical abuse and harassment and sexual assault and harassment. In the case of detention, a further distinction was made within this general category, with police reported to be involved in 98% (157/160) of detention incidents. Security forces/police/military were said to have been involved in 81% (174/216) of incidents of physical abuse and harassment. Another official actor – immigration officials and border guards – were also substantially referred to in relation to both of these types of incident; mentioned in 34% (55/160) of detention incidents and 23% (50/216) of cases of physical abuse. Security forces/police/military were reported to be responsible in 43% (28/65) of sexual assault and harassment incidents, followed by other migrants (34%, 22/65), unknown individuals (22%, 14/65) and groups of thugs/criminal gangs (18%, 12/65). Other categories were either difficult to attribute (death) or split primarily between unknown individuals and thugs/criminal gangs (kidnapping and robbery).

According to a key informant from the government:

“Expulsés or departing migrants have to deal with the police, they are easily identifiable... Any candidate for migration is a target for the police, who will take money from them. They often don’t have the full documents, so they are fined.”

He also felt that these same groups were easy targets for scams by smugglers.

Hotspots in the city

Key informants did not show a lot of consensus regarding areas of Bamako that they felt were specifically risky for refugees and migrants. Several said they didn’t know of such locations, and several others mentioned locations – “along the main arteries” or “in certain neighbourhoods”

– which could be dangerous for anyone (i.e. citizens as well as refugees and migrants). Whereas one of the *transporteurs* working at Sogoniko (bus) station felt that there was a relatively small number of protection incidents affecting refugees and migrants occurring at the station itself, the other *transporteur* interviewed felt that neighbourhoods not far from bus stations (such as Magnambougou and Sougouni Koura) tended to be more dangerous as they are “where other delinquent migrants who have been here for a long time can be found.” Another key informant from a migration and development NGO spoke specifically of “Les Halls de Bamako,” which is reportedly dangerous for migrants, but where they also have the chance to meet their compatriots, making it “the best and worst for migrants.”

Emphasis on socio-economic risks and challenges

While it is clear from the 4Mi data presented above that refugees and migrants face protection risks in Bamako, the most cited incident by far – extortion – is primarily economic. This dovetails with qualitative findings in which key informants and migrant respondents tended to emphasise socio-economic risks and challenges over risks related to violence and aggression. Key informants highlighted challenges migrants have accessing “accommodation, health care and livelihoods,” stated that they “face economic risks above all,” and noted that challenges encountered in Bamako tend to be “psychological, emotional and verbal.” The two male Guinean migrant respondents interviewed outside of migrant shelters both acknowledged that they faced risks of “insecurity” and “protection incidents” by virtue of living at a bus station, but they also mentioned risks related to illness and hunger as these are experiences they have already had. A key informant from AME who works specifically with *expulsés* and *migrants de retour* also noted that for these groups risks are primarily

psychological and economic, related to social and livelihood reintegration.

Greater female vulnerability to sexual exploitation

Key informants pointed to women and children on the move as being particularly vulnerable to protection risks, although one key informant stated his belief that in the specific case of extortion, men are more likely to be victims. While multiple key informants spoke of the vulnerability of women and children in general terms, several specifically zeroed in on sexual exploitation and prostitution as dangers faced by women and girls. According to key informants, Nigerian women appear to be particularly associated with this phenomenon. 4Mi data relating to protection incidents which took place in Bamako showed that 16% of the female respondents reporting that they had witnessed or experienced a protection incident in Bamako indicated that it was sexual assault or harassment, compared to 3% of male respondents.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the two female migrants interviewed at migrant shelters both gave birth during their time in Bamako, and reported receiving substantial support, making specific reference to pre- and post-natal care and hospital visits. This suggests that while there may be particular vulnerabilities faced by female refugees and migrants, there are also some assistance measures available which are specifically targeted to their needs. Additionally, a key informant from a development NGO spoke of a national referencing tool being developed with DRC which can help in the fight against labour and sexual exploitation of young female migrants. Another, from the government, spoke of his belief that when it comes to labour exploitation in particular, “more and more organisations are defending the rights of these girls so they get a salary.”

Access to assistance

In terms of assistance more broadly, all migrant respondents – whether in a shelter or not – indicated that they had been able to access support. All reported receiving assistance from NGOs, with several specifying “lots of help” or “many times.” According to a female Liberian migrant respondent staying in a shelter:

“When you have problems, there are many organisations here. They help you; they look into your problem... They are taking care of you; they are feeding you. They are giving you some clothes.”

The two migrant respondents interviewed outside of shelters – even one who had only been in Bamako for two days – mentioned receiving assistance from NGOs, but they both also spoke of being helped by “people of good will.” However, one of these respondents (a Guinean male), in Bamako for close to a year, did indicate that “as time goes by people will think you are autonomous and

will no longer see you being helped.” Migrant respondents also generally reported feeling included in the city, although this seems to largely be tied to the efforts of the local organisations that support them rather than linked to specific government efforts.

Notwithstanding the generally positive outlook of migrant respondents regarding access to assistance, key informants identified some gaps they believed needed to be addressed. Several key informants highlighted the need for further psychosocial support (PSS) particularly for people who have returned or have been returned to Mali. One key informant specifically singled out people who have been expelled from Algeria or Mauritania as being in need of this support. Another stated that while it is good for migrants (from outside of Mali) to be taken care of in a migrant shelter, even *migrants de retour* have needs (housing, psychological, health) for which the Ministry has little budget. A third illustrated his call for further PSS by explaining, “the failure of a migration project is a tragedy for the migrant and his or her family.”

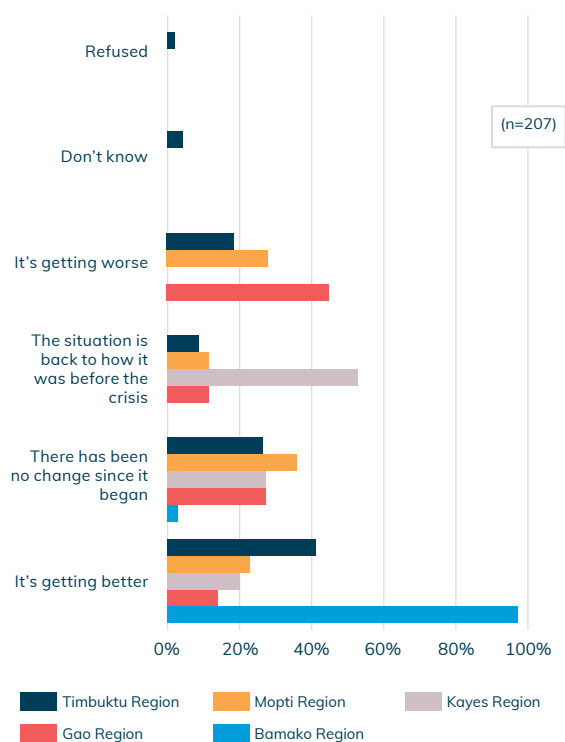
A key informant from AME, which was involved in consultations surrounding the development of PONAM, stated that while he feels that the policy does take into account the needs of these groups, there is nonetheless room for improvement, notably to axes 1 (*the protection and securing of migrants*) and 3 (*the promotion of reintegration of returning migrants*). He is hopeful that the Plan of Action currently being developed will take these elements into further consideration, and underlined how the wider migration context makes this so important:

“In recent years, the socio-political and economic crises in many developing countries have led to the mass departure of young people in search of better opportunities. At the same time, restrictive human mobility policies are being adopted in host and transit countries. This is putting the lives of thousands of people at risk. We would like to see greater protection for migrants and their property throughout their journey.”

7. Bamako, migration and COVID-19

Bamako was initially considered the “epicentre” of the pandemic in Mali,²⁶ with 88% of confirmed cases as of 9 May.²⁷ As of late July it still accounted for approximately half of the confirmed cases in the country.²⁸ Seeking to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Government of Mali took a variety of decisions which affected mobility and livelihoods in Bamako and in the country more broadly, including a curfew (March 26–May 9)²⁹ and the closure of land and air borders.³⁰

Figure 6: Pandemic situation improving or not?



Of the respondents to the 4Mi COVID-19 survey in Bamako, interviewed in July, all were aware of COVID-19, and all but one were worried about catching it, and about the impact it could have on their health. No respondent indicated that COVID-19 was a factor in their decision to leave their country of origin, with nearly 60% saying that they had departed before the crisis. Interestingly, 97% (28/29) of respondents in Bamako felt that the situation vis-à-vis the pandemic was “getting better,” which contrasts sharply to responses in other locations in the country. This is apparent when considering the response “it’s getting worse” (Bamako – 0%, 0/29; Gao – 44%, 20/45; Kayes – 0%, 0/15; Mopti – 27%, 12/45; Timbuktu – 19%, 14/73).

Access to health services and assistance

Several key informants expressed their belief that everyone – whether Malian or not – had access to the same protections against COVID-19 (with one alluding specifically to access to health services). While no specific examples were given of how this may (or may not) be working in practice, 4Mi data does seem to support the idea that refugees and migrants can get healthcare, with 79% (23/29) of respondents saying they could indeed access health services if they had COVID-19 symptoms, and the remaining respondents (6) saying they didn’t know whether or not they could do so. Notably all respondents were over the age of 18; according to one key informant, people under the age of 18 need to be accompanied to access health services, which could pose a barrier to access for young migrants.

When asked whether they had received additional support during the pandemic, all respondents in Bamako stated they had not. However, when asked whether they needed extra help in the context of the pandemic, only 55% (16/29) of respondents in Bamako said yes. This contrasts quite sharply with respondents in the rest of Mali, 98% (175/178) of whom reported needing additional assistance, and may suggest that pre-COVID-19 support structures for refugees and migrants were stronger in Bamako than elsewhere in the country.

Discrimination / xenophobia during the pandemic

No key informant mentioned seeing an increase in violence against foreigners as a result of the pandemic, and several stated specifically that they did not believe this to have been a problem. However, in terms of discrimination and xenophobia more broadly, the perspectives of key informants were more mixed. While several who work with migration related CSOs/NGOs stated specifically that they did not believe this to have been a problem, two key informants who work in and around bus stations (*transporteurs*) and two key informants who are associated with migrant shelters had a different perspective. According to one *transporteur*, “there was a lot of discrimination against migrants” at the bus station where he was working, and the other stated that “communities saw them (migrants) as sources of contagion for COVID-19.”

The latter two respondents showed some divergence regarding the evolution of community perspectives. One stated that “after the intense moment of COVID-19, the

26 Africanews. Op Cit.

27 Dubois, O. (2020, 13 May). [Mali: le Covid-19 en étau entre pouvoir civil et pouvoir religieux](#). Le Point Afrique.

28 Luthi, E & Kone, D. (2020, 20 July). [In Mali's COVID-19 fight, knowledge is power](#). UNICEF.

29 Chahed, N. (2020, 9 May). [Mali/covid-19: Levée du couvre-feu sur toute l'étendue du territoire](#).

30 IOM (2020, March). [West and Central Africa — COVID-19 — Regional Mobility Context Monitoring](#).

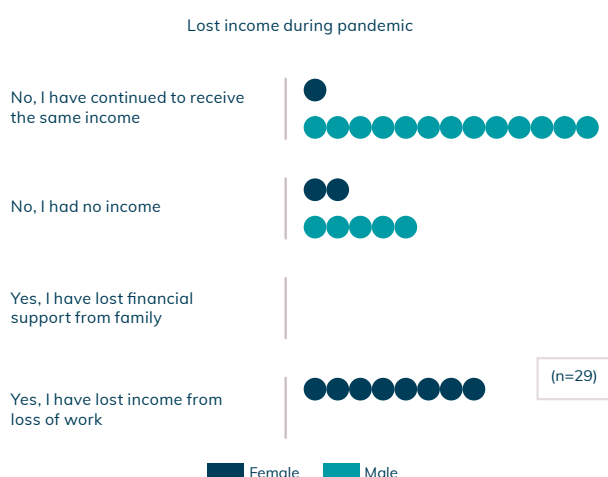
community asks itself a lot of questions about the place of origin of all migrants with a view to not being a victim of COVID-19 contamination.” According to the other, “in the beginning there was discrimination against migrants, they were even afraid to leave the shelter so as not to be discriminated against by the population, saying that they are the ones who bring the disease COVID-19 to Mali. But over time this is no longer the case because Malians no longer even believe in the existence of the pandemic – some people think it is a government project to get money.”

In contrast, none of the respondents interviewed in Bamako for the 4Mi COVID-19 survey reported experiencing increased racism and xenophobia in the context of the pandemic. This may indicate that instances of discrimination against refugees and migrants were somewhat limited by both time and location. They appear to be more prominent in the early days of the pandemic when fear and uncertainty in general were high, and in locations – such as bus stations or migrant shelters near these stations – where populations of refugees and migrants were particularly transient.

Impacts of COVID-19 on work and daily life

Key informants in general did not speak of observing major job losses for refugees and migrants brought about by the pandemic, although the two *transporteurs* interviewed attributed such job losses as they saw to “suspicion” and “distrust” on the part of the general population vis-à-vis migrants. Key informants did, however, point to some domains of work that they believed to have been particularly affected, citing transport and work that occurs in the evening as being impacted due to the curfew. They also highlighted challenges for domestic work and jobs in hotels, restaurants and bars, which were deemed to have affected female migrants in particular. These losses seem to have been temporary, as a key informant from ARACEM interviewed in August noted that as food and entertainment establishments re-opened, he was observing people returning to these jobs.

Figure 7: Lost income during the pandemic



The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of female refugees and migrants suggested by key informants is corroborated by 4Mi data. 28% (8/29) of respondents to the 4Mi COVID-19 survey interviewed in Bamako said they had lost income due to COVID-19 restrictions resulting in loss of work (48% continued receiving the same income – 14/29; 24% had no income before the pandemic – 7/29). The respondents who reported losing income were all female, 73% of all female refugees and migrants interviewed in Bamako in July.

Stress and limited movement – at times linked – were both observed in and reported by refugees and migrants. Key informants spoke of the stress inherent in being blocked from returning to countries of origin and of being cooped up with limited ability to move around. When asked about impacts on their daily lives, 48% (14/29) of the Bamako respondents to the 4Mi COVID-19 survey reported that they are “more worried and stressed,” and a “lack of freedom of movement” was cited by 34% (10/29) of respondents (all male). A key informant working at an NGO-run migrant shelter pointed out that one challenge of constrained movement is that young people stuck at borders or at bus stations face potential emotional and physical mistreatment, and also may be at greater risk for consuming tobacco and alcohol. Another key informant, also working at an NGO-run migrant shelter, saw both a cost and a benefit to limited movement, sharing the following perspective:

“On the one hand, the impact has been very negative and positive at the same time. Negative on the limit of travel, also financially as they will no longer be able to make their contributions to their respective families. Positive for street children and girls who go to the gold panning areas – they can no longer move around these bad places – at least it curbs prostitution and trafficking of underage girls.”

Impacts of COVID-19 on migratory journeys

Key informants and refugees and migrants responding to the 4Mi COVID-19 survey both emphasised border issues as a particular challenge. In addition to the obvious difficulties border closures pose for onward or return journeys, key informants also spoke of how “being blocked” may cause people to run out of money. Of 4Mi COVID-19 respondents surveyed in Bamako, 66% (19/29) cited an increased difficulty in crossing borders when asked what impact the crisis has had on their migratory journey, although 24% (7/29) of respondents reported no impact.

One key informant working for a migrant shelter stated that:

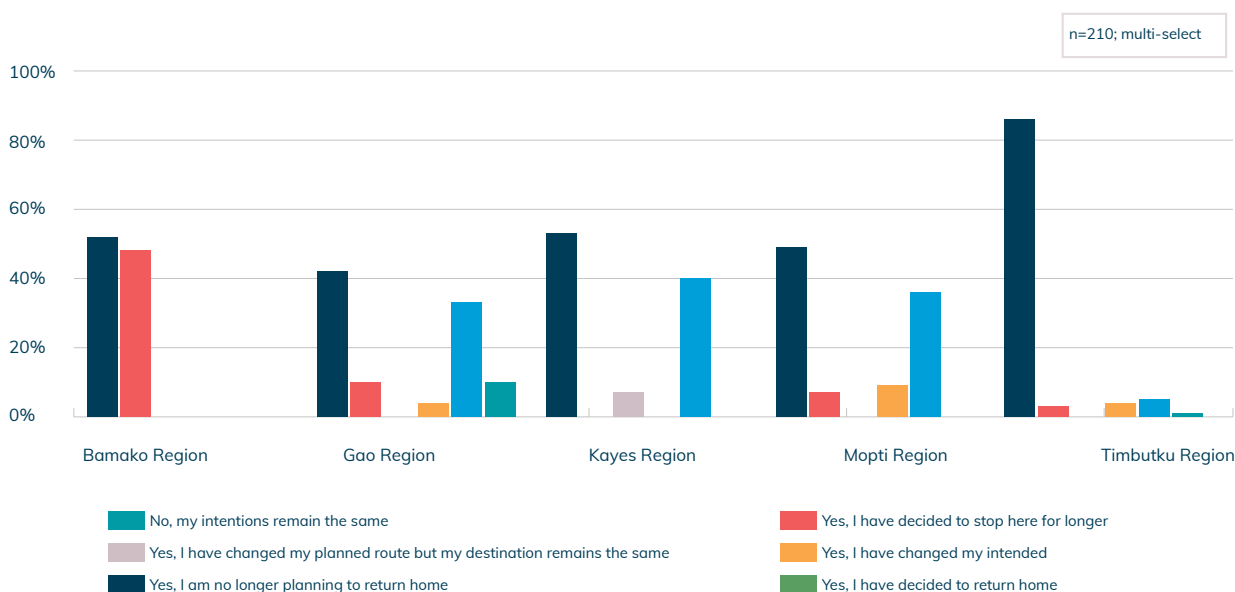
“faced with this pandemic, many migrants are tired to the point that some of them go to the borders to see if there are any smuggling routes to go back to their countries without going through the main routes.”

He felt that this was particularly the case for young male migrants from Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone. However, according to 4Mi COVID-19 survey data, 97% (28/29) of respondents in Bamako reported that they did not know “how the need for using smugglers has changed” since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. Nobody interviewed in Bamako indicated that they perceived a greater need to use smugglers during the pandemic, as compared to nearly a third to two thirds of respondents reporting this elsewhere in Mali (Mopti – 69%, 31/45; Timbuktu – 64%, 47/73; Kayes – 47%, 7/15; Gao – 31%, 14/45). It may be that there is a distinction to be made here between the migrants observed by

the key informant, who apparently wished to return to their countries of origin immediately, and the sample of refugees and migrants interviewed for the 4Mi survey, none of whom reported wishing to return home and who generally seemed to feel less urgency regarding movement (see below).

There is also an illuminating contrast to be seen between respondents in Bamako and elsewhere in the country in response to the question, “Have you changed your plans as a result of the coronavirus outbreak?” Responses in Bamako were split almost evenly between “No my intentions remain the same” (52%, 15/29) and “Yes I have decided to stop here for longer” (48%, 14/29). Whereas a plurality of respondents in all other survey locations in Mali indicated that their intentions remained the same, only in Bamako did a sizable percentage of respondents say that they have decided to stay where they are for longer. It seems very possible that the previously discussed opportunities that Bamako can afford could play a role in this.

Figure 8: How have migration plans changed



8. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Bamako is a city of complex migration dynamics. It is a major crossroads for people – Malians, West Africans and others – migrating through the region, as well as northward to the Maghreb and Europe. It is a substantial pole of attraction for internal migration, and also brings migrants from other places, primarily in West Africa, who come to work and settle. It is a city where Malians and others who have been forcibly expelled or have returned from migration to other countries can be absorbed and make a new start. It is also a city that benefits from the substantial contributions of diaspora Malians.

While Bamako was emphasised as a city of transit, it nonetheless appears that refugees and migrants in transit find Bamako to be a place where they can stay for more prolonged periods of time – often to earn money for their journeys – and particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It does not seem that the state has played a major role in creating a conducive environment for refugees and migrants in Bamako through policy; rather factors like the labour market (for instance a booming construction industry), a relative abundance of organisations that can provide assistance and support, and a welcoming and hospitable culture appear to be primary elements of opportunity. Instead, the policy emphasis of the Government of Mali is on creating opportunities and safeguards for the migration of its own citizens, support for them in returning to Mali, and mechanisms to leverage the development impact of diaspora contributions. This is perhaps unsurprising given the magnitude of remittance flows to Mali, and the visibility of these funds in community development projects.

Risks for refugees and migrants do exist in Bamako, and according to 4Mi data, security forces (including the police) play a prominent role in incidents such as extortion, and physical abuses for instance. Nonetheless, risks other than violence came through most strongly in this case study, with the majority of respondents (57%) who reported protection incidents in Bamako indicating that they had paid a bribe or gift to government officials, and an emphasis being placed on socio-economic risks in the qualitative findings.

While the COVID-19 pandemic can be said to have posed a major risk to refugees and migrants, indications of discrimination against them were limited, and 4Mi respondents largely reported being able to access healthcare if needed. However, the pandemic and measures to counter it did lead to increased stress, and a loss of income among female 4Mi respondents.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, this study puts forward the following recommendations for programming and policy:

1. Implement the objectives and actions of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), adopted by Mali, in consultations with civil society and migrant organizations. The GCM also offers a blueprint for targeted responses to COVID-19 for people on the move. For example, access to health care should be available for all - irrespective of migration status; maintaining “firewalls” between immigration enforcement and access to services; releasing migrants from immigration detention; extending work and residency permits; regularising status; eliminating discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discourse on migration.³¹
2. Expand on the dissemination of the ECOWAS free movement protocol already articulated in the PONAM by targeting government actors and security agents who deal with migrants and refugees with a specific sensitization about how the protocol should govern their interaction.
3. Support local civil society and NGOs – particularly those which oversee migrant shelters – in sensitizing refugees and migrants who are in transit through Bamako on their ECOWAS rights of free movement. Ensuring that information is available in relevant languages will be particularly important.
4. Building on the consultative precedent of the PONAM development process, bring Bamako’s active migration-related civil society together with local officials for targeted discussions on how to improve protection of refugees and migrants residing in and transiting through Bamako.
5. Further develop concrete policies, programs and action plans to harness and channel remittances for the development of Bamako.
6. In conjunction with other support programs (socio-economic reinsertion etc.), expand psychosocial support services for expulsés and migrants de retour, including those which recognize the important role of the wider community in helping these groups reintegrate.

31 For more detailed findings and recommendations on the relevance and use of the GCM in the COVID-19 response see Mixed Migration Centre (2020), [COVID-19 and the Global Compact for Migration. Is a Compact born in a crisis born again in the whirlwinds of three global crises](#); and United Nations Network on Migration (2020), [The Global Compact for Migration \(GCM\): Well Governed Migration as an Essential Element of Effective COVID-19 Response](#).

Annex: Interviews conducted

Table 1: Key Informant Interviews

#	Date	Organisation
1	23/06/2020	Development NGO with migration programming
2	29/06/2020	NGO with migration programming
3	13/07/2020	Government official
4	17/07/2020	Development NGO with migration programming
5	19/07/2020	Migration and development NGO
6	19/08/2020	Transporteur – Medina-Coura
7	20/08/2020	Transporteur – Auto-gare
8	25/08/2020	ARACEM - Association des Refoulés de l'Afrique Centrale au Mali (Association of Central African Refoulés in Mali)
9	27/08/2020	CIGEM – Centre d'Information et de Gestion des Migrations (Center for Migration Management and Information)
10	Throughout September 2020	Email Correspondence with AME – Association Malienne des Expulsés (Malian Association for Deported)

Table 2: Refugee and Migrant Interviews

#	Date	Organisation	Gender	Location
1	07/07/2020	Liberia	Female	Sotuba ACI
2	07/07/2020	Guinea	Male	Sotuba ACI
3	26/08/2020	Benin	Male	Niamakoro
4	26/08/2020	Cameroon	Female	Niamakoro
5	10/09/2020	Guinea	Male	Sebenikoro
6	10/09/2020	Guinea	Male	Sebenikoro



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). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

For more information visit:
[Mixedmigration.org](https://www.mixedmigration.org)

