

MALI: GENDER ISSUES BRIEFING NOTE



Headline Facts

Women seats in Parliament	Women working in the labour force	Girls' primary school enrolment (net)	Women's experience of physical violence in lifetime	Women police personnel
8.8% (2018) ¹	43% (2017) ¹	58% (2017) ¹	38% (2013) ²	19% (2018) ³



GENDER EQUALITY Mali is socially and ethnically diverse, with women's status and social role varying between communities. There are considerable barriers to gender equality, including discriminatory social norms and legislation, exacerbated by conflict and political instability, displacement and poverty which disproportionately impact women and girls. Mali is among the 10 lowest ranked countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (143 out of 149 countries).⁴ Indicators on gender equality, such as girls' education, health and family planning, show a lack of progress.¹⁵ Mali has a higher than average female labour force participation (43%) compared to the global average (39%)¹ but a large proportion is in agriculture where women have little rights or access to land.⁶

MIGRATION AND TRAFFICKING

Conflict, political turmoil and insecurity have led to a complex, fluid migration situation with large movements of internally displaced persons (estimated IDPs: 99,000).⁷ Female migration is largely related to family reunification, whereas men often migrate for economic reasons, with some returning radicalised and armed from the Maghreb.⁸ Since 2012, displacement and poverty have deepened grievances and helped swell the ranks of armed rebel factions.⁹ There is a growing sex trafficking network,^{10,11} associated with rebel and Islamic extremist groups and reportedly facilitated by corruption and complicity among local police and *gendarmes*.¹¹

SECURITY AND JUSTICE

Women's participation in defence and security forces is essential for building trust and peace, according to consultations with over 3,000 people in Gao, Timbuktu and Bamak, led by IMRAP and Interpeace.¹² Respondents said that a woman in uniform can reduce violent confrontations and help security forces better fulfil their mission.¹² Women account for 2.6% of military personnel and 19% of police personnel deployed as part of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).³ Women constitute 23% of civilian personnel overall, including 26% of international positions, 19% of national positions and 31% of UN Volunteer positions.³

The Government of Mali launched their first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in 2012, revised in 2015.¹³ Women's access to justice remains limited, with few survivors reporting violence or seeking care, partly due to the risk of stigma/reprisals, low confidence in legal and medical institutions.¹⁰ Recent initiatives have led to an increase in cases of sexual violence brought to court in Gao and Timbuktu from 1% to almost 14%,¹⁰ and a Gender Sub-Commission created under the Commission for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation has led to more women testifying.¹⁴ The Peacebuilding Fund has also established *cases de la paix* (peace huts) in northern Mali, where survivors receive psychosocial and medical support.¹⁰

VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Women play diverse roles in violent extremist groups, which are increasingly active in central and northern Mali.^{15,16,17} Women have been informants, laundresses and cooks.¹⁸ They have also been arrested for supplying fertilisers to make explosives,¹⁸ but extremist groups deny using female suicide bombers.¹⁹ Marriage with young girls has also been used by foreign extremist fighters in northern Mali to strengthen local ties and influence.^{19,20} However, there are also reports that girls are forced to marry members of extremist groups (Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO), gang-raped and abandoned after a swift divorce.⁸ Women are vital agents of change in preventing violent extremism, including in promoting counter narratives to violence as part of their role as mothers.^{8,21} Research with young people in Sikasso, Gao and Bamako also shows links between violent gender norms, masculinities and radicalisation.²²

DECISION-MAKING

Malian women have different priorities relating to conflict, security and stability than men; a recent study found women peacebuilding practitioners expressed significantly more concern about sexual or gender-based violence, as well as concerns about abuse by the security forces or government.¹⁷ Women successfully lobbied for a 30% gender quota for appointed officials and electoral lists in Mali, which was relatively effectively applied in the 2016 local elections, increasing women's representation on electoral lists.³ However, women's political participation remains below the global average (24%), with low representation in parliament (8.8%).¹ 10 ministers (27%) are women, below the 30% quota for women in appointed positions.²³ Women are underrepresented in the mechanisms for implementing and monitoring the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali; only 1 of the 34 Agreement Monitoring Committee members is a woman.²⁴ In December 2018, a working group recommended the direct participation of women in the committee and other follow-up mechanisms, and a women-led, independent consultative forum has been created to monitor the Agreement.^{3,24} Various workshops have been held on women, peace and security, including a 3-day event in July 2018 where participants identified facilitating women's participation in peacebuilding as a priority.³

SOCIAL NORMS

Discriminatory social norms can act as a significant barrier to gender equality in Mali. The OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) for Mali is 0.52, indicating 'very high levels of discrimination' in social institutions.²⁵ Surveys reveal that 76% of women and 53% of men believe a man has the right to beat his wife.²⁶ 86% of men and 62% women believe that gender equality is an imported concept.²⁶ However, it should be noted that some norms are declining over time and with education,²⁶ and not all norms are negative.²⁶ For example, an international survey found positive norms among Malian men and women around the value of being a good husband and father.²⁶

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

There are high levels of GBV in Mali, which are likely to be underreported: 69% of women who experienced violence have never sought assistance.² Forms of GBV include intimate partner violence, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), trafficking and sexual exploitation, early marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and other harmful traditional practices such as wife inheritance.^{5,11} Nearly 4 in 10 women (38%) have experienced lifetime physical violence, mostly by an intimate partner (65%).² Rates are higher among Sénoufo/Minianka (48%), Tamachek/Bélla (44%) and Sonraï (43%) ethnic groups.² More than 1 in 10 women aged 15-49 (13%) reported experiencing sexual violence at any time of their life, with higher levels among Sonraï (18%) and Peulh (17%).² Risk factors for experiencing physical and sexual abuse include controlling behaviour, childhood exposure to violence, and husband's use of alcohol.²⁷ There are also reports of conflict-related sexual and physical violence against women and girls in the northern and central regions of Mali which face a volatile security situation.^{15,28} The first ever law criminalising GBV in Mali is now undergoing review, prepared by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and Families with international support.²⁹ An implementation plan prepared by the UN on CRSV in Mali covers five priorities: prevention, protection, accountability, capacity-building and communication.²⁸ Adolescent girls are often the target of CRSV, and have unique protection and assistance needs.⁸ Early and forced marriage is a concern, with more than 1 in 2 girls (52%) marrying before age 18 and more than 1 in 6 (17%) marrying before age 15.²⁹ FGM/C is widely practiced among all ethnic groups, apart from Sonraï and Tamachek, with 83% of girls and women (15-49 years) having undergone FGM/C.¹

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[Image]: Defense and Security Forces in Mali. Photo credit: IMRAP <https://www.interpeace.org/2018/10/womens-participation-in-the-defense-and-security-forces-in-mali/>