



**DRG LEARNING, EVALUATION, AND
RESEARCH ACTIVITY
MALI COUNTER-TRAFFICKING IN
PERSONS (C-TIP) RESEARCH
FINAL REPORT**

SEPTEMBER 2021

Prepared under Contract No. GS-10F-0033M / Order No. AID-OAA-M-13-00013
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ACRONYMS

AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ASM	Artisanal and small-scale mining
C-TIP	Counter-trafficking in persons
CNCLTPA	National Coordination Committee against Trafficking in Persons and Assimilated Practices
CNS	National Committee to Monitor Programs to Combat Trafficking in Children in Mali
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CSE	Commercial sexual exploitation
CSO	Civil society organization
CVE	Countering violent extremism
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRG-LER	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance – Learning, Evaluation, and Research
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
G5	Unofficial group of European Union countries (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain)
GBV	Gender-based violence
GLO.ACT	Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants
GOM	Government of Mali
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key informant interview
LRA	Lord’s Resistance Army
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MJP	Mali Justice Project
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PTF	Technical and Financial Partners
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
PVO	Private voluntary organization
PYD	Positive Youth Development
RCT	Randomized controlled trial
TIP	Trafficking in persons
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act
ToT	Training of Trainers

UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mali is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking in persons (TIP), including commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), forced labor, and child labor. Victims are transported from and into neighboring West African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Benin) for forced and child labor, as well as to Europe for the sex trade via Libya and Algeria (IOM, 2005). Mali is currently on the U.S. Department of State Tier 2 watch list,¹ and in 2019, the Nigerian government estimated around 20,000 girls were victims of sex trafficking in Mali (United States Department of State, 2021). According to the U.S. Department of State's 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, unemployment, food insecurity, and security threats drive some families to sell their children into domestic servitude or forced labor in gold mines. Internal trafficking is more prevalent than transnational trafficking. Boys from Mali (as well as Guinea and Burkina Faso) are subjected to forced labor in agriculture – especially rice, cotton, dry cereal, and corn cultivation – artisanal gold mines, domestic work, transportation, begging, and the informal commercial sector. However, Malian women and girls are often victims of sex trafficking in Gabon, Libya, Lebanon, and Tunisia, and of domestic servitude in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia

Several contextual factors converge to make Mali a particularly vulnerable hot spot for trafficking, including violence, weakness of state institutions, high levels of poverty, low levels of formal employment, a weak educational system, norms that traditionally encourage rural-to-urban migration and de-prioritize rights for women and girls, and limited resources for counter-trafficking in persons (C-TIP) efforts. While Mali has signed numerous international agreements and updated its domestic laws and institutions to engage in C-TIP – and multiple assessments have found recent governments have prioritized such efforts – the scope of the problems and the state's inability to control much of its national territory mean such efforts have been inadequate. Further, worsening violence, political instability (as highlighted by major protests and a subsequent coup d'état in 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic, continued poverty, and climate change point to TIP continuing to pose a challenge in Mali, and in the Sahelian region more broadly. Women and children are especially vulnerable to victimization.

This report summarizes research on the drivers of TIP in Mali and recent efforts by Malian governments and other actors to address it in conjunction with recommendations for improved C-TIP programming. It focuses on five thematic areas for research: 1) platforms providing services to TIP victims and vulnerable populations; 2) awareness-raising efforts; 3) C-TIP involving youth; 4) legal training; and 5) how humanitarian needs, development challenges, and violent extremism interact to produce a context conducive for TIP and one that challenges C-TIP efforts. This report focuses on two types of research strategies: 1) interviews with key informants working in the C-TIP space in Mali, and 2) a two-round review of available literature on these five thematic areas, with a particular focus on methodologically rigorous evaluations and studies directly or indirectly related to TIP in Mali, the West African region, and globally.

Some key findings from each thematic area are below:

¹ Countries whose governments do not fully meet the Trafficking Victims Protection Acts (TVPA) minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

PLATFORMS FOR VICTIMS AND SERVICES FOR POPULATIONS VULNERABLE TO TIP

- Evidence from the studies in this thematic area underline the importance of understanding the specific details of local contexts and engaging communities at higher risk (including mining communities and conflict-affected zones) in sustaining holistic responses.
- There are mixed levels of awareness and willingness to participate in anti-TIP-related activities in some communities, according to an organization implementing C-TIP programming in Mali. However, the same organization notes that communities tend to trust legal professionals (such as paralegals) from their own communities, signaling a potential avenue for trust and capacity-building.
- In Mali, trafficking in children and child labor are deeply concerning and occur within the context of the historically grounded rural exodus to cities and cultural views on the normative nature of child labor (common throughout the world). The migration to more urban settings leads to work in sectors such as domestic work, hospitality, and artisanal mining, where children are vulnerable to exploitation and sexual trafficking by recruiters. This exodus leaves rural areas with a smaller labor pool for agricultural activities and may contribute to increased rates of child labor and forced child labor.
- Both key informants and the literature emphasize the importance of leveraging existing local structures of care and family and women’s social networks. These community responses to child labor and trafficking could be used as the basis for developing such structures of care.

AWARENESS RAISING

- Though there is a dearth of rigorous evaluations on awareness-raising campaigns, evidence suggests that, at least in the short term, such campaigns can improve knowledge about TIP and reduce desire to engage in activities that might make one vulnerable to it (e.g., irregular migration).
- Key informants in the qualitative phase also spoke about the importance of raising awareness on the issue of trafficking at both the community and government level and of the possibility of behavior change resulting from this. However, studies have shown these awareness-raising activities can be most successful when coupled with other intervention strategies and focused on multiple subpopulations (such as both children and parents/adults).
- Radio-based awareness-raising programming combined with “listening clubs” and campaigns using mobile technologies (e.g., social media) provide platforms for connectivity and fostering discussion on issues related to TIP, according to a local organization working on C-TIP, providing a potentially promising avenue for continued intervention.
- However, campaigns may become increasingly difficult to conduct as the security environment deteriorates, particularly in the northern and central regions of the country, where vulnerability to TIP might be the most prevalent.

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

- Community-level mobilization is the most common form of youth recruitment to armed groups, particularly in the context of the state’s inability to offer security and rule of law.

Effective programming to address child trafficking must account not only for individual vulnerabilities and characteristics but also consider family and community contexts.

- Holistically designed, youth-oriented interventions are particularly needed to inform communities about the risks of child trafficking, including programming involving income generation, economic opportunities, psychological support, and community engagement.
- Evidence suggests the development of local youth leadership programs and the introduction of face-to-face behavior-change campaigns are useful C-TIP mechanisms.

LEGAL TRAINING

For this thematic area, qualitative interviews yielded richer information than the evidence review, as we uncovered very few rigorous evaluations. The takeaways below reflect these results:

- Interviewees mentioned financial support from the government, in addition to streamlined resource allocation, would be helpful to their efforts, as currently most organizations rely on international funds. Interviewees also highlighted the importance of coordination between existing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) working in the C-TIP space.
- Respondents recommended training programs for individuals working in the C-TIP space in government ministries and official spaces, facilitation of access to appeal for victims, and improved mechanisms for assisting in rescues and rehabilitation.
- Suggestions to improve policies regarding trafficking included capacity-building workshops for magistrates and legal professionals, as well as awareness campaigns on the intricacies of existing laws.
- Activities designed to counteract stigma around trafficking and exploitation are also viewed as necessary, as the current sociocultural environment makes reintegration challenging. Mechanisms providing legal aid and rehabilitation assistance to victims are thus viewed as vital in reintegration.
- Hands-on training on TIP-related issues for law enforcement and NGO/CSO staff, as opposed to focusing solely on theory, is highly important, according to key informants. Activities such as role play and emphasizing appropriate skills are important in helping these professionals provide important contextual services and support. Further, mechanisms such as training of trainers can help mitigate the staff turnover and reassignments challenges that may affect law enforcement and NGO/CSO sectors.
- Although legal frameworks for prosecution exist, they are not always effectively applied due to lack of proper mechanisms and resources for victim identification. Perpetrators may also not be convicted due to a lack of reliable data that would implicate them, according to findings from key informant interviews.

TIP REDUCTION IN NEXUS CONTEXT

- Insecurity and violence were found to be contributors to TIP as well as barriers to creating effective C-TIP programming. This is primarily due to the difficulty in implementing successful initiatives in zones affected by conflict.
- Some factors identified with resilience in these communities included: communities' negotiations with armed groups to keep schools open, parental chaperones of students to school in the context of insecurity, and the development of local-level incentives to retain teachers at conflict-affected schools.
- A number of studies highlighted the importance of providing psychological support and social reintegration for children affected by conflict. Psychological support services should be designed to have a long-term view of psychological health. Short-term interventions are not as effective as dedicated long-term psychological health services. These studies also emphasized the importance of creating approaches adapted to the specific environment.

Furthermore, the report summarizes key takeaways from the research and provides several actionable recommendations for those working in the C-TIP space in Mali in the future, such as:

HOLISTIC APPROACHES

Interviewees and much of the research pointed to the need for holistic approaches engaging a range of local stakeholders, including national and local government officials, security and armed actors, educators, the media, civil society, victims of trafficking, and community members, with particular focus on women and youth. Literature and key informant interviews (KIIs) emphasize that varying levels of trust in government and legal authorities, as observed in the Afrobarometer Mali survey, and historical acceptance of certain forms of slavery, such as descent-based slavery still practiced in certain Malian communities, can make communities resistant to programming that does not holistically address the drivers for TIP. In particular, both the literature and KIIs emphasized the need to foster collaboration and coordination among diverse actors working on C-TIP to create an integrated, sustained response.

COMMUNITY BASED

Additionally, efforts to counter trafficking in persons must be community-based. Mali's unique history, stark geographic differences between the northern and southern regions, and the deteriorating security situation make it vital to tailor C-TIP efforts to the local context. Finding trusted interlocutors, leveraging accepted communication channels (such as listening clubs), and context-specific program designs are vital to ensure local buy-in and program designs reflecting the local context. Approaches that worked in certain areas might be ineffective, or even counterproductive, in others. Programs designed without adequate knowledge of local dynamics – and without input from local actors – are less likely to be sustainable or effective.

EVIDENCE BASED

Finally, efforts must be evidence based. The literature review uncovered a relative paucity of studies in areas directly or indirectly related to C-TIP that included rigorous evaluation, such as experimental or quasi-experimental methods, or even systematic attempts to collect high-quality observational data to

measure program effects. This finding is applicable for Mali, the Sahel in general, and the world. Interviewees also stressed the necessity of collecting verifiable data in order to rigorously evaluate progress and focus of existing C-TIP interventions so organizations could work in tandem instead of having overlapping program components. All efforts moving forward must include clear strategies for monitoring and evaluation, to enable implementers to gauge the effectiveness of their own interventions, as well as other actors working in the C-TIP space, in Mali and beyond, to learn from their efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Under the Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance – Learning, Evaluation, and Research (DRG-LER) Activity, USAID requested a team of international and Malian researchers to examine evidence supporting five specific types of interventions aiming to reduce and prevent trafficking in persons (TIP) in Mali, as well as document the perception of key actors regarding the Government of Mali’s (GOM’s) policies and programs related to counter-trafficking in persons (C-TIP) and of donor support provided to Mali to combat C-TIP.

The research questions that guided this work are:

- (1) What are the most effective approaches in providing platforms for victims and services for populations vulnerable to TIP to reduce/prevent this abuse?
- (2) What are the most effective interventions related to awareness raising (with a focus on radio) to prevent TIP?
- (3) What are the most effective types of youth programming, both youth led and otherwise, to raise awareness of TIP?
- (4) What are the most effective approaches of legal training to increase prosecution of criminal activity related to TIP?
- (5) What are the most promising forms of programming to reduce TIP in a complex environment like Mali that include humanitarian assistance and traditional development assistance (sometimes referred to as the “nexus”)?
- (6) How do interviewees perceive the effectiveness of the GOM’s programs and policies related to C-TIP?
- (7) How do interviewees perceive the effectiveness of donor support provided to Mali for C-TIP?

We addressed the first five research questions related to specific intervention types primarily via a systematic and structured review of existing studies and research on the subject across a range of sources, including published literature, program and project evaluations, and grey literature.² Our priority was to identify rigorous studies, including experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations, academic studies, and meta-analysis. Questions 6 and 7 were addressed on the basis of interviews with key stakeholders and officials working on TIP-related issues in Mali and are presented in the first section of the report. These same interviews also informed and contextualized the findings from the literature and our recommendations.

This report summarizes the evidence our team uncovered related to the five types of interventions aiming to reduce and prevent TIP and combines this evidence with qualitative insights gathered from government and non-government actors active in combating and preventing TIP in the country. This report also identifies key evidentiary gaps we identified across and within the five intervention types and

² Grey literature is information that does not fall within traditional academic or publishing media. This report counts working papers, government documents, reports, and policy literature among the grey literature it examines.

provides recommendations related to future evidence generation efforts and programmatic approaches adapted to the Malian context.

This work is primarily intended to inform the future programmatic decisions of USAID/Mali. However, it also seeks to inform the relevant USAID operating units regarding evidence gaps and possible approaches to consider to combat and prevent TIP in Mali and the broader Sahel region. We also hope it will serve to inform future GOM programs and strategies, as well as those of other actors active in C-TIP in the country, including international donors and local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs).

The first section of this research report provides background on TIP in Mali, including a summary of the current situation as well as key laws and policies from this context, as well as the two cross-cutting research questions about the effectiveness of the GOM and donor programs related to TIP.

The report goes on to provide a summary of overarching research findings that apply across themes and programmatic recommendations drawing on information from key informant interviews (KIIs), expert input from the research team, and the literature-based evidence review. The section of the report following the research findings examines each of the five themes in the framework of the research questions, using information triangulated from the multiple sources noted previously.

METHODS

This report synthesizes information from three sources: a systematic literature review, qualitative data collection through key informant interviews, and structured written input from Malian C-TIP experts on the research team.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

The team developed a document keyword search strategy that iteratively combined up to four terms. This strategy was used in each of the gateways listed in column 1 of Table 1, and a French translation of these terms was also used in databases and systems where French resources were available. For the first round, we began with a broader search using two to three terms – those in columns 2 and 3 of Table 1 – and later added the terms from column 4 to refine and improve the search. We also focused our search on Mali, West Africa, and Sahel in column 3 and broadened our geographic scope to Africa and the world more generally in the second round of the review.

Table 1: Overview of Key Terms for Document Search

Gateways	Search Term 1	Search Terms 2 and 3	Search Term 4 (for sector-specific refinement)
<p>Government websites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ dec.usaid.gov (USAID DEC) ▪ justicemali.org (Mali Ministry of Justice) <p>Bilateral/multilateral organizations in the TIP space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ilo.org (ILO) ▪ iom.int (IOM) ▪ unodc.org (UNODC) ▪ worldbank.org <p>International and local research institutes focused on TIP, evaluation, and evidence-building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ development.evidence.3ieimpact.org (3IE Development Evidence Portal) ▪ ridie.3ieimpact.org (RIDIE - Registry for International Development Impact Evaluations) ▪ povertyactionlab.org (Innovations for Poverty Action and Poverty Action Lab) <p>Bibliographic databases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Econlit ▪ IDEAS/RePeC ▪ Web of Science <p>Databases of peer- and non-peer-reviewed e-journals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PLOS ▪ Sage Publishing ▪ Elsevier ▪ JSTOR <p>General search engines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ scholar.google.com ▪ news.google.com 	<p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trafficking in persons (TIP) ▪ Human trafficking ▪ Sex trafficking ▪ Forced labor ▪ Trafficking victims ▪ Sexual exploitation ▪ Slavery ▪ Child labor ▪ Forced migration ▪ Child soldiers ▪ Commercial sexual exploitation of children ▪ Commercial sexual exploitation ▪ Forced begging ▪ Domestic servitude <p>French</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traite des êtres humains ▪ Trafic des personnes ▪ Trafic sexuel ▪ Travail forcé ▪ Victimes de traite ▪ Exploitation sexuelle ▪ Esclavage ▪ Travail des enfants ▪ Migration forcée ▪ Enfants soldats ▪ Exploitation sexuelle des enfants à des fins commerciales ▪ Exploitation sexuelle commerciales ▪ Mendicité forcée ▪ Servitude domestique 	<p>Search Term 2</p> <p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation ▪ Study ▪ Research ▪ Report ▪ Assessment <p>French</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Évaluation ▪ Étude ▪ Recherche ▪ Rapport <p>Search Term 3</p> <p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mali ▪ West Africa ▪ Sahel ▪ Africa <p>French</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mali ▪ Afrique de l'Ouest ▪ Sahel ▪ Afrique 	<p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approach ▪ Reduction ▪ Prevention ▪ Intervention ▪ Platform ▪ Prosecution ▪ Awareness ▪ Legal Training ▪ Youth Programming ▪ Humanitarian Assistance

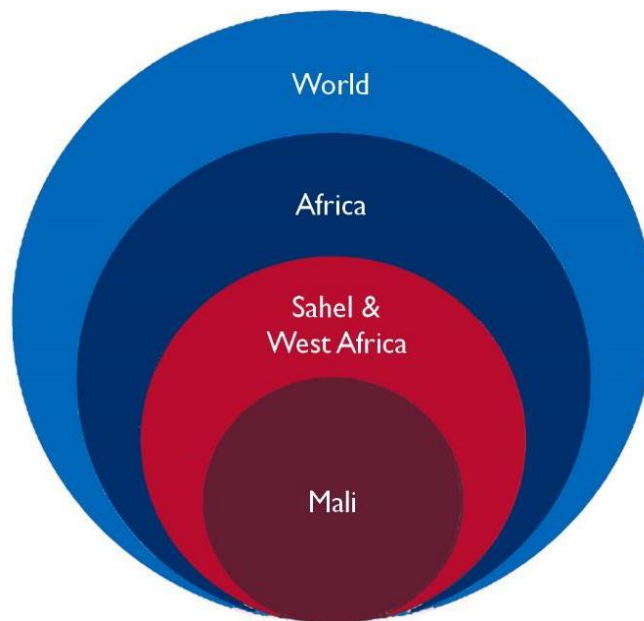
We undertook an initial screening of several hundred documents and created a tracker including only those considered sufficiently relevant. The screening involved reading the executive summary or abstract and an in-document search for certain keywords. The screening also allowed us to do an initial classification of relevant documents based on forms of TIP, type of intervention (if any were a focus of the document), year, and geographic region. As of the end of the first round, this tracker included 180 documents, and a total of 99 documents were then classified as a priority through this process.

In accordance with USAID’s terms of reference, the systematic literature review focused on evidence directly or indirectly related to TIP and C-TIP interventions. As a result, the team prioritized evaluations and studies that used rigorous methods such as randomized control trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental methods, quantitative analysis of intervention or administrative data, and existing systematic reviews.

We then formed subgroups within the research team based on thematic expertise and experience; each thematic sub-team read and coded documents relevant to their thematic area using a separate coding template. This template captures the type of study or evaluation, methodological details, countries and subnational divisions on which the documents focused, type(s) of TIP and policy/program design implications, key takeaways, key gaps and limitations, and identified drivers of TIP. For documents studying a particular intervention or intervention(s), we also coded the goals and types of the interventions, the target group(s), the outcomes achieved, and the effectiveness based on outcomes versus targets/goals.

The second round of the literature review included broadening the scope of the search to all of Africa and also to relevant global research. This round identified 52 documents. To incorporate the level of rigor recommended by USAID in previous comments, 13 RCTs and rigorous quasi-experimental studies were shortlisted, reviewed, and coded from the initial list.

Figure 1: Visual Representation of the Geographic Scope of the Study



KEY INFORMANT RESEARCH

The qualitative research component consisted of KIIs conducted with key stakeholders and officials working in the C-TIP space in Mali. NORC developed a KII tool with feedback from USAID. KIIs were conducted in French, lasted approximately 90 minutes, and were documented with detailed notes. When possible and authorized by respondents, audio from these interviews was also recorded, transcribed, and translated for analysis. Thirteen interviews were conducted, either in person in Mali or using electronic platforms such as Zoom.

A structured questionnaire was also distributed to Malian C-TIP experts on the research team. Four experts completed this questionnaire. Responses to these questions informed the recommendations provided in this report.

KEY INFORMANT CHARACTERISTICS

Respondents interviewed worked at their organization for an average of 13.5 years and had been in the C-TIP sphere for 14 years on average. Interviews were conducted with a wide range of employees in these organizations, ranging from administrative assistants who had spent four years working with the leaders of the organization, to presidents and directors with three decades of experience. Some respondents had decades of professional experience in international trafficking and trafficking-adjacent spaces, such as forced labor and child labor. Respondents had worked on these issues in the Middle East, North Africa, and West Africa.

Three-quarters of respondents participating in this research worked at organizations focused on issues regarding children in the C-TIP space, including child trafficking and child labor. Thirty-eight percent of respondents worked on sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, including genital mutilation. Other C-TIP-adjacent spheres in which respondents worked included forced begging, forced migration, and descent-based slavery.

Organizations participating in this study were involved in the creation, facilitation, support, and implementation of numerous programs related to C-TIP. Over 50 percent worked in partnership with other organizations or the GOM to support programs ranging from awareness campaigns, capacity building for local organizations, service delivery to victims, reintegration of trafficking victims, and interventions countering early marriage. One-third worked with organizations focusing on rescuing victims, nearly half on prevention-based activities such as informational initiatives, and 38 percent on rehabilitation services. Victims rescued by these organizations ranged from 8 to 23 years of age, and were from multiple regions within Mali, as well as from neighboring countries, including Nigeria, Guinea, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, Senegal, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso.

OVERARCHING RESEARCH FINDINGS

CURRENT TRAFFICKING SITUATION IN MALI: TYPES AND DRIVERS

Mali is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking in persons. Victims are transported from and into nearby West African countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Benin), as well as to Europe for the sex trade, via Libya and Algeria (IOM, 2005). In 2019, the Nigerian government estimated around 20,000 girls were victims of sex trafficking in Mali (United States Department of State, 2019).

Conflict in the north of Mali earlier in the decade also contributed to prolonged instability throughout the region, higher rates of poverty, and trafficking of contraband, migrants, and drugs (Bøås, 2012). Children are particularly susceptible to various forms of trafficking, including in the cotton and cocoa industries, commercial sexual exploitation in urban areas, forced marriage, and forced labor in artisanal gold mines (Verité, 2017).

In the KII, respondents echoed the literature by emphasizing forms of trafficking related to children, including forced begging, soldiering, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, and forced child labor. Gold mines were described as epicenters of trafficking – not only for children, but for forced labor and sex trafficking among adults as well. Finally, displacement and insecurity were described as key drivers of trafficking, particularly in northern and central Mali. Two respondents noted trafficking was a growing concern in Mali, and one mentioned the U.S. State Department had recently raised increased concerns about TIP in the country, which was refocusing government attention on this issue. There was near-unanimous consensus that trafficking against children was the most pressing priority in Mali, with the issue of child trafficking often closely linked with sex trafficking for both minors and adults. Respondents also noted that descent-based slavery was a form of trafficking that was prevalent even in urban centers like Bamako. This type of TIP is not accounted for by existing legislation in Mali, making identification of victims and prosecution of perpetrators challenging.

Respondents reflected on the key drivers of human trafficking in the country, with broad consensus that poverty and growing insecurity, particularly in the north of the country, have caused an increase in trafficking. Indeed, the latest data available (2020) from the Afrobarometer survey conducted in Mali indicate that 81 percent of Malians felt the economic conditions in the country were fairly bad or very bad,³ and that nearly a third did not have enough food at least several times in the year preceding the survey.⁴ The same survey also indicates that 29 percent of Malians feared an armed attack by political or religious extremists in the two years preceding the survey, while 8 percent experienced such an attack.⁵ Furthermore, 12 percent of respondents in the 2018 round of the Afrobarometer survey noted that they or their family members left home for another place in the country due to the ongoing crisis and conflicts in the North, and another 6 percent reported leaving home for another country. In the 2020 round, insecurity was classified as a major problem by 97 percent of respondents and terrorism by 96 percent. However, the presence of armed forces (Malian, French, and other) was also classified as a major or moderate problem by 72 percent of respondents, indicating that one of the common solutions to quelling insecurity is perceived as problematic. The security crisis also affected livelihoods: in the 2018 Afrobarometer round, 13 percent of respondents indicated they or their family had to close their businesses, 14 percent suffered job loss, and 14 percent had to change their occupation.

Due to high poverty rates, young girls are frequently regarded as economic liabilities and are thus trafficked to other villages or towns to be married. According to a UNICEF report on trafficking of women and children (UNICEF, 2003), early marriage is one such contributing factor. Gaps also exist in legislative measures between prosecuting traffickers and closely monitoring intermediaries who facilitate

³ The 2020 data suggest this perception was shared at similar rates in both urban and rural locations (80.5 percent vs. 81.5 percent, respectively) but was slightly stronger among women than men (83.2 percent vs. 79.3 percent, respectively).

⁴ The 2020 data suggest lack of sufficient food was particularly common (and more frequent) in rural areas (35.3 percent vs. 22.2 percent in urban areas) and was slightly more often reported by women than men (33.7 percent vs. 31.1 percent, respectively).

⁵ The 2020 data suggest that both fear of armed attacks was higher in rural areas (30.5 percent vs. 24.2 percent in urban areas), and their occurrence was nearly twice as high in rural areas (9.8 percent vs. 5 percent in urban areas). Men are slightly more likely to have feared and to have been subject to armed attacks.

legal migration, making legal action difficult. Additionally, certain socio-cultural factors normalize child labor, which renders children more susceptible to this form of exploitation (UNESCO, 2005).

Almost all respondents also highlighted context-specific cultural and religious factors. In many cases, victims of trafficking are viewed with indifference because they may be foreigners or from vulnerable groups in society. A tolerance of slavery in the north was also described as a factor allowing this abuse to continue there. Four interviewees specifically cited Koranic schools for children and Koranic teaching as enabling trafficking. As one respondent said, “Work is seen as part of the socialization of children [in these schools].” One interviewee disagreed, noting that when his organization talked to children begging in the streets, the majority of them were not in a Koranic school but had instead been encouraged to beg by their parents. The interviewee observed that the organization of Koranic teachers is very committed against begging. Two respondents highlighted the importance of recognizing the historical roots of slavery in Mali. As one noted, “Slaves by descent often lack everything. It plays into the sustainability of this scourge.”

Respondents also highlighted the lack of coordination between government agencies and NGOs working in the C-TIP space as one of the reasons the prosecution of traffickers and other perpetrators largely went unchallenged. This is due to a variety of reasons, including – but not limited to – an acute need for improved inter-agency communication platforms, capacity-building and sensitization programs for Ministry and civil society officials, and increased access to legal aid for victims.

GOVERNMENT OF MALI’S PROGRAMS AND POLICIES RELATED TO C-TIP

Over the last two decades, Mali has acceded to or ratified several conventions, agreements, and protocols relating to descent-based slavery and TIP. Some of these agreements are bilateral, focusing on the coordination and collaboration between Mali and neighbors, such as Côte d’Ivoire,⁶ Burkina Faso,⁷ Senegal,⁸ and Guinea.⁹ The bilateral agreements served as a springboard for the Multilateral Cooperation Agreement to Combat Child Trafficking in West Africa, signed on July 27, 2005, in Abidjan. Other instruments are similarly regional in scope, such as the Multilateral Regional Cooperation Agreement to Combat Trafficking of Persons, in particular Women and Children in West and Central Africa (2006) and the ECOWAS-wide Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance and the Convention on Extradition.¹⁰ Finally, some are continent-wide, such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children, which was ratified on June 3, 1998, and entered into practice in Mali in 1999.

More recently, Mali took several important steps to develop domestic institutions and a legal framework focused on combating TIP. In 2006, Order No. 06-1940/MPFEF-SG established the *Comité national de suivi des programmes de lutte contre la traite des enfants au Mali* (CNS, National Committee to Monitor Programs to Combat Trafficking in Children in Mali). The CNS is responsible for evaluating the actions taken in the context of the implementation of programs to combat the trafficking of children, for following the implementation of cooperation agreements signed by Mali to combat the trafficking of children, and for learning from the experience acquired in this field to take responsibility for child victims of trafficking. Mali then established, in collaboration with the International Organization for

⁶ The cooperation agreement between Mali and Côte d’Ivoire in the fight against cross-border trafficking of children signed in 2000 in Bouaké.

⁷ The cooperation agreement between Mali and Burkina Faso in the fight against cross-border trafficking of children signed in 2004 in Ouagadougou.

⁸ The cooperation agreement between Mali and Senegal in the fight against trafficking/trafficking of children signed in 2004 in Dakar.

⁹ The cooperation agreement between Mali and Guinea in the fight against child trafficking signed in 2005 in Conakry.

¹⁰ The former was signed on July 29, 1991, in Dakar, while the latter was adopted in Abuja on August 6, 1999.

Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the *Comité national de coordination de la lutte contre la traite des personnes et les pratiques assimilées* (CNCLTPA, National Coordination Committee against Trafficking in Persons and Assimilated Practices) under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice of Mali in 2011. The mission of the CNCLTPA is to coordinate and monitor C-TIP actions, including the development and implementation of a National Action Plan and subnational action plans and the mobilization of necessary resources to implement C-TIP actions. In addition, this body is responsible for the establishment of a TIP data collection and processing system. To that end, the CNCLTPA provides some training to NGO members on trafficking prevention activities and annually convenes key C-TIP actors to highlight challenges in the field. However, various actors have repeatedly lamented that the CNCLTPA and the CNS have not been operating consistently or continuously since their respective establishments (ILO, 2009).

The following year, Law 2012-023 on combating trafficking in persons and related practices was adopted. This law defines trafficking in persons and related practices (e.g., organized exploitation of persons for begging); establishes various sanctions based on the specific circumstances of the crime; outlines the procedures that can be used to investigate and judge perpetrators; and specifically discusses the protection of witnesses. Witness protection in Mali is unique to this law and something certain studies have highlighted as important for effectively combating other forms of transnational organized crimes (Alliance pour Refonder la Gouvernance en Afrique, 2016). This law also includes the traffic of migrants as a related practice, which risks creating confusion among those who enforce it and judge cases (UNODC, 2020). By the end of 2017, the GOM began to revise the legislative framework around TIP and migrant trafficking to better align it with international norms and the Malian context. This led to the drafting of a migrant smuggling law and a revised anti-trafficking law, but they have not been approved by the GOM as of the end of 2020.

More recently – in February 2019 – the CNCLTPA, in partnership with UNODC and IOM, developed and released a “National Action Plan” based on four strategic axes aligned with international standards for C-TIP: namely, the prevention of trafficking of persons, prosecution at the criminal justice level, protection and assistance to victims of trafficking, and promotion of coordination and cooperation in the fight against trafficking in persons.

Various organizations and bodies monitoring trafficking have noted Mali has made improvements in recent years but indicated significant progress remains necessary. For example, in 2014 the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families praised the significant legislative and regulatory measures adopted by Mali to combat TIP, the establishment of a national committee to coordinate efforts against TIP and related practices, and the conclusion of agreements with neighboring countries to combat trafficking in children (UN, 2014). However, the Committee made a number of recommendations for further work, including: 1) the systematic collection of data on trafficked persons, disaggregated by gender, age and origin; 2) improved training on TIP for law enforcement, judicial actors, teachers, and health care actors; 3) strengthening of mechanisms for investigating TIP cases and prosecuting and punishing traffickers; 4) protection and assistance to all TIP victims (in particular by providing shelters and helping them rebuild their lives); and 5) increased international, regional, and bilateral cooperation to prevent and combat TIP.

The U.S. State Department listed Mali in the Tier 3 list in 2017 and upgraded it to the Tier 2 Watch List in 2018 and to Tier 2 in 2019 but downgraded it back to the Tier 2 Watch List in 2020, where the

country remained in 2021 as well.¹¹ Its 2020 report indicated Mali does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of TIP but is making significant efforts to do so, even if the country did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period (United States Department of State, 2020). Among the recent efforts lauded were the prosecution of descent-based slavery cases for the first time, increasing convictions for TIP-related activities and continuing training and awareness raising activities, along with measures to address child soldier issues. However, the State Department noted Malian law enforcement and judicial actors continued to lack resources and understanding of TIP, which impeded C-TIP efforts. Shelter and services for victims, especially male victims, remained insufficient and primarily restricted to Bamako. The State Department also recommended dedicated budget, resources, and personnel be allocated to the anti-trafficking committee and that the committee institutionalize monthly meetings to improve operationalization of anti-trafficking policies and inter-ministerial coordination.

According to organizations interviewed, established sub-ministries have varying levels of efficacy – respondents indicate the Ministry for the Promotion of Family could improve its current state of resource allocation, but the Ministry of Malians Abroad and African Integration carries out valuable sensitization programs on the topic of trafficking.

The KIs underscored the challenges related to lack of funding and capacity. Respondents indicated their organizations find funding to be a significant hurdle in the planning and implementation of activities. This is due to funding and implementation of activities coming mostly from civil society and NGOs applying for and advocating for international funding. “The state can help us access funding from donors. State support is purely technical. Funding comes from donors,” said one respondent.

Most respondents agree the primary strength of the Malian state framework is in its influence in networking and working through NGOs. However, opinions diverged on the efficacy of this network: one respondent stated, “Ministries are not specialists and do not have the information needed to develop and propose robust and adapted solutions,” while others found the informational trainings implemented by the GOM for NGO officials to be helpful, in addition to the facilitation of access to international funding.

The most significant suggestion for improvement by the GOM was to improve the funding mechanisms provided to C-TIP organizations. Organizations participating in this research mentioned financial support from the government and streamlined resource allocation would be helpful to their initiatives, as currently most organizations rely on international funds. As one respondent noted, “If we have funding, I am convinced that we can have a positive impact on the phenomenon.” Respondents also recommended training programs for individuals working in the C-TIP space in ministries and official spaces, facilitation of access to appeal and denunciation processes for victims, and improved reaction mechanisms for assisting in immediate needs for rescues and rehabilitation.

¹¹ Tier 1 indicates the government of the country fully meets minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Tier 2 indicates the government of the country does not fully meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards. Tier 2 Watch list is similar to Tier 2, except: 1) the absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; 2) there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or 3) the determination a country is making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional steps over the next year. Finally, Tier 3 indicates the government of the country does not fully meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of coordination between existing NGOs and CSOs working in the C-TIP space. One respondent noted that the CNCLTPA is an entity that wields considerable influence in terms of operationalization of partnership initiatives and has recently been promoting collaboration amongst principal C-TIP actors. According to another respondent, “At the NGO and CSO level, their coverage is highly uneven across the geography and the lack of presence of the state in certain regions makes their work quite challenging.” Finally, consideration of targeted support for different forms of TIP is also necessary – one respondent considered this particularly necessary for victims of descent-based slavery.

Opinion on existing Malian government policies and laws converged on the notion that, while sufficient legislation against trafficking currently existed in Mali, low awareness of their existence, a lack of external funding for implementation and NGO action on prosecution, and a weak penal code impeded the enforcement of these laws. One respondent noted, “There are magistrates who do not know the existence of the Malian law against trafficking. It exists, but it is weakly applied. Prosecutors have shown this is not being enforced enough.” Respondents also noted that while existing trafficking laws deal with certain offenses, such as commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor, and bondage, the interpretation of this legislation does not consider other offenses, such as forced begging or descent-based slavery.

Nonetheless, respondents agreed the existence of a legal basis on which it was possible to build more effective iterations of laws was overall beneficial to the C-TIP sphere in Mali. Suggestions to improve policies regarding trafficking included capacity-building workshops for magistrates and legal professionals, as well as awareness campaigns on the intricacies of existing laws. Respondents also mentioned the challenges associated with prosecution to be closely connected with corruption; according to one key informant, “The big [trafficking] networks are known, but the law does not act.” The 2020 Afrobarometer survey suggests Malians broadly feel the same, as 87 percent of respondents felt that at least “some” judges and magistrates were involved in corruption, and 62 percent felt that “most” or “all” of the judges and magistrates were involved in corruption. Malians had a broadly similar view about law enforcement, as 85 percent of respondents felt that at least “some” police and gendarmerie officers were involved in corruption, and 53 percent felt that “most” or “all” of the police and gendarmerie officers were involved in corruption.¹²

Activities designed to counteract stigma around trafficking and exploitation are also viewed as necessary, as the current sociocultural environment makes reintegration challenging. As one respondent noted, their organization had received death threats when a rescue had been planned to remove an underage girl from a brothel. It was not clear who made the threat, but this shows the resistance that C-TIP organizations face in their programming. The same respondent noted that involving imams in raising awareness about the importance of C-TIP could be a way to address these challenges.

REFLECTIONS ON DONOR AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSES IN MALI

Respondents recognized the importance of international donors in the fight against human trafficking in Mali but continued to emphasize the importance of working hand in hand with national and local actors. Key informants emphasized lasting and genuine collaboration was the only way to achieve effective and sustainable programming. Indeed, a main finding from the interviews was the consistent call for “greater

¹² In the 2020 data, respondents in urban areas were significantly more prone to thinking that “most” or “all” judges, magistrates, and police and gendarmerie officers were involved in corruption. The difference between rural and urban respondents ranged from 12.8 percent for police and gendarmerie officers to 14.9 percent for judges and magistrates.

cohesion between programs,” as one respondent described it. The recommendations from the interviews can generally be summarized as: coordination, continuity, and capacity-building for local actors.

One of the most concrete recommendations to achieve this was to create a national strategy to harmonize and improve the approach to human trafficking, which would act as a framework within which NGOs and donors can better work. As one respondent noted, “If coordination between the technical and funding partners and the GOM is improved, it would extend to and help the whole country. TIP is not just a question of justice but also covers migration, working conditions, family life. People representing these different angles need to be coordinated.” Another respondent noted, “We really need to coordinate the state-civil society-Technical and Financial Partners (PTF)-Malian state partnership and put everything under the perspective of state objectives.”

Respondents called for co-creation of priorities, issues, and approaches between donors, the government, and implementing organizations. As one respondent described,

“The problem with working with donors is that they often come with a drawn line. Consultation is necessary because the Malian state, in collaboration with civil society, already has its program and therefore international donors should be part of this action plan instead of bringing their own priorities.... Prior consultation is therefore necessary, and they can therefore help the Malian state to achieve the objectives it has outlined ... so as long as [the Malian] state is not involved in the programs, it will not work.”

This call was echoed by nearly all interviewees, who emphasized the importance of coordination across sectors, as well as across different local national and international levels.

Two respondents noted the 2012 crisis diverted donor and government attention from the issue of trafficking, despite the crisis increasing the risk of trafficking. As one person described, “Since 2012, the crisis has averted the eyes of the donors of trafficking.”

Respondents also mentioned other challenges of working with donors, including: slow disbursement of funding; lapses of funding; and lack of understanding of the true needs of the population. Despite these challenges, respondents noted funding from international donors had created a positive impact on the group. As one interviewee noted, “Without international donors, we will not have our needs met. These supports are effective, relevant, and useful for us.”

The final major theme emerging from the interviews related to challenges with capacity and, relatedly, implementation of programs in the field. Two respondents described corruption by authorities as a problem: one said, “In the field, the elders often capture resources to the detriment of the children who are the victims.” This challenge was also linked to a lack of local understanding of the issue of human trafficking and how it harms communities. Lack of community buy-in was linked to low knowledge of what constitutes trafficking, and local organizations generally called for more training on how to implement programs, including principles of do-no-harm. As one respondent said, “Working with national and international NGOs is difficult. Considering due diligence and do-no-harm as key guiding principles and ensuring these organizations adhere to them is not trivial.”

GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR C-TIP PROGRAMMING IN MALI

Recommendations from key informants broadly echoed the lessons from the systematic review, although the qualitative data underscored context-specific dynamics and challenges not elaborated in published literature. Both the literature and the expert input from KII and the research team emphasized the vital importance of creating context-specific programs leveraging local expertise, encouraging community engagement, and utilizing existing structures. Such approaches have an added benefit of helping programs be holistic (taking an all-community approach) and sustainable (by integrating into existing structures) – two characteristics experts identified as key to creating successful programming. As one interviewee stated,

“Community-driven approaches are where things start and end, and communities need to be involved in the creation, design, implementation, and evaluation and learning. That might mean serious capacity and autonomy building efforts by NGOs and funders, but it’s very important.”

Respondents described a holistic approach in a number of ways. One noted it is important to look at different forms of TIP and consider how they might be related – acknowledging there might be common vulnerabilities or characteristics among potential trafficking victims. Another respondent flagged the importance of looking at TIP through various lenses, including understanding security and borders, promoting information campaigns, undertaking institutional reinforcement and capacity-building, and providing assistance to victims.

Respondents also stated that strong advocacy, legislative backing, and monetary support by the international community would be integral to reducing TIP in Mali. One respondent also said that the private sector in industries such as mining could also play important roles by mobilizing funding through corporate social responsibility initiatives.

A number of barriers to successful programming were also cited – many of these relating to government and local leader responses but some related to funding structures. Inadequate laws and policies at the national level were cited as barriers to effective programming in multiple interviews.

Participants also provided input on ways to improve program design, funding structures, and international-national collaborations. A number of interviewees stated the importance of ensuring projects funded by international donors continued to strengthen the capacity of both their programmatic partners (NGOs or community organizations), as well as the government. As one respondent noted, “It’s critical to involve the national committee on TIP in all approaches, whether they can and should be directly involved or not, because it helps in developing the committee’s capacity.”

One interviewee described how there could be a disconnect between international funding and local organizations; bridging this gap could be key to addressing the call to make C-TIP programming community-centered, holistic, and sustainable. As the interviewee described,

“Many actors are very young and inexperienced but have much goodwill and eagerness to take action. At the international level, it’s not always easy to get involved with an organization with two years of experience and existence, but those that are well established are sometimes stuck in a logic of getting funding rather than being really involved effectively.”

Another respondent reflected on the intersection between multilateral organizations and national government and NGOs, saying:

“The goal is to accompany [local actors in Mali], but not replace them. It’s critical to involve the national committee on TIP in all approaches ... because it helps in developing the committee’s capacity.”

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of collecting rigorous qualitative and quantitative data in order to effectively combat trafficking. These statistics would assist in informing effective future programming and implementation of C-TIP initiatives. One respondent said, “Due to this lack of reliable data, the fight against trafficking is not well informed.”

RESULTS BY RESEARCH THEME

In this section, we provide a more detailed summary of the research findings from the qualitative interviews, expert input from the research team, and the first and second round of the systematic review for each of the five key research themes.

PLATFORMS FOR VICTIMS AND SERVICES FOR POPULATIONS VULNERABLE TO TIP

This topic area covers a wide range of subjects and services in the Malian context, including child labor, gold mining, migration, and sexual exploitation/trafficking of women. Results from the key informant research as well as the literature highlighted the importance of direct services. Key informants were particularly clear that C-TIP services geared toward children should be a top priority and noted that campaigns to raise awareness about this issue, to support practitioners in doing their work, and to support knowledge about C-TIP at the community level were vital. It is important to stress awareness-raising activities around child labor are more successful when targeted at both children and parents, mutually reinforcing the power of a particular message. In addition, awareness-raising efforts should focus on the positive benefits of new behaviors rather than the negative, often legalistic, penalties for noncompliance.

Qualitative interviews highlighted that the type of platform or service provided should be carefully tailored to match the needs of specific communities. According to one respondent, there are mixed levels of awareness and willingness to participate in anti-TIP activities in some communities, due to a distrust of the legal system and authorities. However, communities tend to trust legal professionals (such as paralegals) from their own communities, signaling a potential avenue for both trust-building and capacity-building.

The evidence review produced 19 articles relevant to this focus area: 18 from the first round of literature review and one from the second. The majority of studies used qualitative evidence and emphasized rehabilitation and resources for vulnerable populations need to be grounded in local, context-specific responses drawing upon community input and dialogue to ensure they remain responsive to the needs of vulnerable populations.

The literature broadly mirrored the themes that arose from key informants, including a focus on trafficking involving children, child labor, and trafficking in women (including sexual exploitation) and a

few articles focused specifically on the mining sector. The literature focused on Mali, West Africa, and nearby regions in Africa, with one second-round document on the Philippines.

One relevant study from Mali found an intervention among sex workers in Mali impacted by trafficking had multiple positive effects. The intervention decreased HIV prevalence among Malian sex workers, increased HIV testing, and improved consistent condom usage (Trout, 2015). This and other studies indicate proven methods for serving vulnerable populations can be modified as needed for myriad settings.

Three of the studies in the systematic review used qualitative and quantitative research to examine the effects of artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and industrial mining on Malian communities, concluding that – despite some economic benefits to some community members – children were particularly likely to be exploited in these contexts. One study (Hilson, 2008) provides a case study of dynamics mentioned in the qualitative interviews: a lack of local grounding and false assumptions about the drivers of trafficking can hinder effective approaches. In this paper, Hilson notes many international organizations falsely assumed parents who allow their children to work in mining towns do not value education. This led to programs aimed at convincing parents that school was better than mining work for their kids. However, Hilson found parents were acutely aware education was preferable, but they had little choice or ability to send their children to school because of rural poverty and their existing embeddedness in the debt-producing economy of ASM. Rather than awareness-raising about the value of education, C-TIP programs in this area would be more effective if they provided support for school fees and greater access to schools.

One systematic review we examined looked at initiatives and interventions aimed at reducing incidences of sexual violence and sex trafficking of women and children in areas affected by conflict (Spangaro et al., 2013). The review found there is an acute lack of services for these populations and very few rigorous evaluations.

In his survey of government social security programs instituted across Africa, McGillivray (2010) found these programs were widespread but often limited to certain categories of workers and rarely affect those working in the informal sector, which means those most vulnerable to trafficking may be left out of the government programs they most need (McGillivray, 2010).

Within this theme, documents from the systematic review largely focused on the effects of child labor, migrant work, and sexual trafficking (cross-border TIP of women) on communities in West Africa. The majority of documents drew on qualitative data and focused largely on ideas and opinions of organizations working in the field, with fewer studies looking at the issue from the perspective of communities involved and even fewer considering the perspective of the most vulnerable populations to be an important part of data.

KEY FINDINGS

- The combined research methodologies reinforce the importance of understanding the specific details of local contexts and engaging communities in creating holistic, sustainable, and successful responses. In cases where community trust is harder to gain, it could be beneficial to have representatives from that area conduct outreach on C-TIP initiatives. Mining communities and areas affected by conflict and instability were described as places with the highest risk of

trafficking. Yet a limited number of interventions targeting children and women have been documented, and even fewer have been rigorously evaluated.

- In Mali, trafficking in children and child labor are of deep concern. These forms of abuse occur within the context of the historically and culturally grounded rural exodus to cities or larger towns after completing crop harvest in rural areas. The migration to more urban settings leads to work in informal sectors, such as domestic work, agricultural work, and artisanal mining, where children are vulnerable to exploitation and sexual trafficking by recruiters.
- Both key informant information and the literature emphasize the importance of leveraging and supporting local responses and structures of care that currently exist and often draw upon family and women’s social networks. There is a lack of official structures of care for vulnerable populations and victims of TIP within communities in Mali and West Africa. However, there are community responses to child labor and trafficking that could be used as the basis for developing such structures of care, provided those community responses were better understood.

AWARENESS RAISING

During the research process, awareness-raising activities emerged as a vital element of C-TIP programming. In the systematic review, five overarching types of information campaigns were described: mass media, door-to-door canvassing, community-level meetings, other group meetings, and social media to reach target populations (Tjaden & Morgenstern, 2018). These campaigns convey various types of messages, including information about the dangers of irregular migration, the economic challenges migrants to Europe face, and the possibilities of returnees (from conflict) reintegrating peacefully into their home communities. These interventions were therefore focused on decreasing target populations’ interest in irregular migration, which could make them vulnerable to traffickers.

In expert consultations, the focus was put more firmly on raising awareness among local communities and community leaders, as well as national government. As one respondent noted,

“At the legal system level, there is much in place in Mali, but it’s about application of what’s there [already codified in the legal system] and that takes place at the community level through sensitization.”

Other respondents echoed this call for increasing awareness about the signs of trafficking at all levels: community, local elected officials, and armed and security forces.

Another key informant noted that radio and sensitization campaigns at the community level were particularly effective since illiteracy is widespread in many affected communities. Radio programming emerged as an important approach to raise awareness in vulnerable communities about issues related to C-TIP. Respondents noted that awareness campaigns through this medium also tended to address issues that were specifically relevant to individual communities and that “*groupes d’ecoute*” or listening clubs often formed to listen to these programs together. An advantage of these listening clubs is that they foster discussion and reflection about the content provided and could also serve as a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of a campaign, if their composition mirrors the campaign’s target groups.

The literature review highlighted some promising avenues for potential programming, although the number of rigorous evaluations from West Africa were relatively limited. A separate literature review

on informational campaigns focusing on C-TIP in sub-Saharan Africa made similar conclusions (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2020b). However, we can draw some lessons from the limited research that has been conducted, some of which suggests certain messages can effectively reduce TIP at least in the short term. An RCT in Edo State, Nigeria, found an information campaign aimed at schoolchildren increased knowledge about the risks of irregular migration and knowledge about human trafficking and decreased stated desires to migrate (Obi, Bartolini, & D'Haese, 2019). A survey experiment in Benin City, Nigeria, presented similar findings (Scacco, 2018).

Conversely, a study in the Gambia found that presenting accurate information about the dangers of irregular migration could actually *increase* stated willingness to migrate. In this case, young potential migrants' estimates of the danger of death through irregular migration to Europe was actually about twice as high as it is in reality. Therefore, providing accurate information, at least in this case, *reduced* perceived risks. However, the authors found that providing information about the challenges of obtaining residency in Europe was effective at reducing stated desire to migrate (Bah & Batista, 2018). These studies suggest that factoring in baseline knowledge about risks is important in informational campaigns and that risk-focused campaigns might not be optimal strategies. Rather, as one literature review concluded, informational campaigns should acknowledge that individuals have typically thought significantly about the costs and benefits of migration before ultimately making such a weighty decision. They are therefore unlikely to be moved by simplistic information about associated dangers (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2020b).

Other informational campaigns have focused on conflict zones. A radio campaign in Central Africa aimed at encouraging members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to surrender was associated with modest yet statistically significant decreases in conflict-related fatalities and violent attacks and increases in the number of LRA defectors (Armand, Atwell & Gomes, 2020). This suggests participation in armed groups, which are often major conduits of TIP, can be effectively reduced using radio campaign messages.

While these studies are from countries that differ in many ways from Mali, they do point to some relevant findings. Strategies to educate potential migrants about the dangers of irregular migration and adjust expectations about its potential benefits could be broadly applied in Mali. The avenue and the content of the messaging would still need to be thoughtfully adapted for the Malian context. For example, a promising intervention might involve connecting Malians with counterparts who have engaged in irregular migration, to provide information on the costs, potential dangers, and economic realities of such behavior. One literature review suggested that diaspora communities might be especially important conduits of information (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2020b). That review also highlighted the importance of tailoring information campaigns to local contexts.

One study conducted with women and girls living in shelters in the Philippines found family circumstances are key, in this context, for influencing vulnerability to trafficking (Nyqvist, Kuecken, La Ferrara & Artadi, 2018). Namely, having an older sister and being in a family that had more girls than was "socially desirable" in the local environment were each associated with higher probability of trafficking. On the other hand, those who were only children were significantly less likely to be trafficked. These findings suggest social norms around the contributions of girls to families have important effects on girls' likelihood of being trafficked. A literature review on migration in sub-Saharan Africa found that information campaigns focusing on women are critical, given that group's vulnerability to multiple

challenges and abuses during migration. However, such campaigns should focus less on discouraging migration generally and more on the potential dangers of being tricked and trafficked (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2020b).

Particularly relevant to the current research is a program implementation report from the private voluntary organization (PVO) World Education on a USAID-funded project (“Strengthening Democratic Culture of Malian Civil Society Organizations”). This project provided sub-grants to Malian NGOs and worked on capacity-building for various civil society organizations for advocacy on a number of topics, including but not limited to conflict, youth employment, and the migration of girls. The report concluded there was a strong correlation between institutional capacities of CSOs and success in the management of advocacy projects, and advocacy was more effective when it was closely tailored to regional levels (commune, *cercle*, region) as opposed to central directives (World Education, 2003).

The study of the radio campaign aimed at the LRA also points to the effectiveness of radio messaging to encourage defections from armed groups and potentially reduce incidence of violence. Worsening security in the Sahel has been cited as a major driver of irregular migration and trafficking. Efforts to support conflict resolution and to encourage defection from armed groups could be a promising avenue for C-TIP programming.

In the second round of the literature review, the team reviewed rigorous studies on awareness raising from outside the Sahel context. Two studies measured the effects of different types of messaging on knowledge about – and interest in – irregular migration. One study from Senegal reported results from an RCT on a peer-to-peer information campaign, in which a film of testimonials of migrants’ negative experiences was shown to Senegalese youth, followed by face-to-face discussions with audience members and returnees. Three months after, those assigned to treatment were significantly more aware of the risks associated with irregular migration and viewed such behavior as riskier. They also demonstrated less willingness to migrate (Tjaden & Dunsch, 2020). These findings are echoed in those of a broader literature review, which concluded that peer-to-peer informational campaigns had a relatively higher likelihood of achieving desired outcomes (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2020b).

A two-day training session for women in India also decreased willingness to migrate but did not affect awareness of risks (Pocock, Kiss, Dash, Mak & Zimmerman, 2020). These studies offer tentative evidence on how messaging sessions can affect stated willingness to migrate in the short and medium terms, but we identified little evidence of the efficacy of such strategies for longer-term behavior. Further, these studies provide only limited evidence of what types of messaging strategies will be more effective than others.

Evidence also suggests awareness-raising campaigns related to messaging about C-TIP, particularly for children and other extremely vulnerable groups, were most efficacious in combination with other interventions related to the same issue (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2020a). This evaluation by NORC examining reduction in child labor in cocoa-growing areas of West Africa found informational campaigns were effective at improving knowledge on child labor issues. Qualitative data suggest that these messages resonate particularly with caregivers when they focus on the health implications of child labor, rather than on punitive measures for parents whose children engage in child labor. However, the study notes that these campaigns have limited ability to change practices on their own, as they do not typically account for the financial situation within households. Combining them with complementary programs for parents and other community members, such as livelihood support and provision of school

supplies, yielded statistically significant decreases in child labor and hazardous child labor rates. Finally, stakeholder involvement in these interventions at the local and national government would be highly beneficial components.

KEY FINDINGS

- A limited number of rigorous evaluations have been conducted on awareness-raising interventions. However, some evidence suggests, at least in the short term, such awareness campaigns can improve knowledge about TIP and reduce desire to engage in activities that might make one vulnerable to it (e.g., irregular migration). While these studies have been conducted outside of Mali, they still provide learning that can inform the design and evaluation of future interventions in this context.
- Campaigns are most likely to be effective when they are grounded in an understanding of the local context; peer-to-peer informational campaigns show promise for effective communication. Radio-based awareness-raising programs combined with community “listening clubs” and campaigns using mobile technologies (e.g., social media, a dedicated app) contribute to both referrals of victims to NGOs and provide platforms for connectivity and fostering discussions on issues related to TIP.
- Community- and national-level awareness campaigns have already been implemented in Mali in recent years, including on topics ranging from public health and the judicial system to the responsibilities and performance of local government. Research from other contexts suggests these kinds of interventions show promise for improving knowledge and possibly supporting behavior change. Key informants in the qualitative phase also spoke about the importance of raising awareness on the issue of trafficking at both the community and government level.
- However, campaigns may become increasingly difficult to undertake as the security environment deteriorates, particularly in the northern and central regions of the country. However, vulnerability to TIP may be most prevalent in those very areas where awareness campaigns are most challenging. Drawing on methods that have wide dissemination and do not require in-person meetings (such as radio and social media) may be a promising option to overcome deteriorating security.

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

The importance of working with youth to combat and prevent TIP was one of the strongest findings from our qualitative research. Key informants emphasized children and youth were not only among the most vulnerable to multiple forms of trafficking but also the least equipped to resist exploitation. There was broad consensus, as described earlier in the report, that child trafficking should be a cornerstone of future C-TIP programming.

The interviews and the literature described recruitment by violent non-state actors, forced begging, forced migration, child labor, and early and forced marriage. A number of published sources reinforced findings from the qualitative work, which emphasized child trafficking is driven by a complex set of social, cultural, historic, and economic factors. Effective programming to address this issue must therefore account not only for individual vulnerabilities and characteristics but also consider family and community contexts.

Our research indicates education is a viable pathway to inform and raise awareness about TIP among youth. A qualitative evaluation of a program implemented in over 128 communities in Mali to improve educational opportunities with the goal of combating child trafficking found improved formal or informal educational opportunities raised awareness of child rights, the benefits of education, and risks related to trafficking and exploitative labor (Upton, 2007). However, it was less clear if the project achieved its long-term goals, including reducing child migration. Another important lesson was that a matching capacity in education infrastructure at the local level must exist to meet the increased demand for formal and informal education that such a project generates.

A 2018 study (Dillon, Porreca & Rosati) used an RCT methodology to evaluate the implementation of “speed schools” in Mali. Speed schools are time-limited, cost-effective programs designed to reintegrate out-of-school youth into the educational system. The study found the speed program was successful in retaining nearly 90 percent of the students, and nearly two-thirds integrated into formal schooling after completion of the program. However, there was only a limited impact of the schooling program on child labor, suggesting school attendance and child work can happen simultaneously. In fact, NORC’s 2020 study on child labor in cocoa production in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana noted this situation is common (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2020a). Among children engaged in child labor in cocoa-producing regions of the two countries, more than 90 percent of those age 5 to 14 attended school in 2019, as did 77 percent of those in the 15–17 age group.

However, child labor appears to have some long-term negative consequences, especially in certain circumstances. One quantitative study used a longitudinal household survey spanning 1992–1993 to 2010 in Tanzania to understand and measure these consequences on employment later in life (Burrone & Giannelli, 2019). The study found that even in low-income environments where opportunities are scarce, there are negative consequences – higher risk of vulnerable employment at adulthood – of working at a young age, especially in agriculture. The study found the threshold age is 11–12 years old, after which child labor may lead to non-vulnerable employment, although the size of this positive effect in terms of probabilities is low. The number of hours worked per week also mattered, as did gender. Girls were particularly affected in the context of farm activities, although domestic chores were also significant. Further, the study suggests, while working early in life does not typically have a large negative effect on the quantity of schooling, it may have a strong negative effect on the quality of education.

Other studies emphasized the complex drivers of child labor in Mali, including the fact that, historically, migration – including for children – has been viewed as a rite of passage for youth. One article cites these factors and stresses the need to understand the local context, which often disagrees with the framing of this migration as “child trafficking” and “child labor” (Dougnon, 2016). For example, a qualitative study found communities condone systematic migration of girls to urban areas to gain resources for the girls’ dowries. Communities described advantages of urban migration, including delayed marriage and exposure to the practice of delayed marriage (Engebretsen et al., 2020). Another qualitative study from West Africa described similar dynamics: drivers of migration included poverty and hardship, peer pressure, and social support networks in receiving locations (Dako-Gyeke, Kodom, Dankyi & Sulemana, 2020).

A quantitative study in Mali found the probability of child labor is lower when the child’s parents earn more than expected relative to their education level and when financial returns to education are high in local labor markets (Kuépié, 2018). The effect of the local labor market was found to be particularly

strong. The findings suggest “policies aimed at rewarding education in the labor market may have important spillover effect on child labor.” However, it noted the effect of labor market returns had less relevance for agriculture and a greater impact on schooling decisions for boys than girls. It also suggested a disproportionate number of jobs in the informal sector, which is less likely to reward education, can discourage parents from investing in education. This study emphasizes parental evaluation of labor markets as determining choices about enrolling children – particularly boys – in school; if markets reward educational attainment, parents are more likely to enroll children.

Given the particular vulnerabilities youth in Mali face regarding TIP, including scarce opportunities for education and formal employment, youth-oriented interventions seem particularly needed. In interviews, key informants emphasized the importance of holistic approaches when undertaking such programming; including parents, community members, local authorities, and educators is critical to creating successful programming. One respondent described a three-pronged approach to addressing child trafficking for victims:

“If the children are not psychologically stabilized [from their experiences during trafficking], if they return to their families, they will reoffend. They need regular monitoring, and socio-professional and economic reintegration. It is a source of the future for the child. If he is busy with training or income generation, this will help stabilize him and respond favorably to the small financial needs that these parents may ask of him. There should also be emphasis placed on communication and advocacy so that parents understand how trafficking is harmful to children.”

The combination of psychological support with education or income-generation and community sensitization was mentioned as a good practice by other interviewees as well. The qualitative results particularly emphasized the latter component – ensuring the understanding and full engagement of the community.

This sentiment was borne out in the literature. For instance, one study (TetraTech, 2017) described an evaluation of a USAID-funded program to reduce child begging, also a challenge in Mali, in two neighborhoods in Dakar. The program worked with leaders to establish community monitoring committees and gave community grants to support repatriation efforts of the students back to their homes. The evaluation found the program was very successful in one community and had no effect in the other. Contextual factors, political will, community awareness about the issue, and other factors were all cited as reasons for the divergent results. The study emphasized the importance of creating contextualized programs and identifying community champions for future efforts.

A broader USAID-funded study in Senegal found that poverty, limited educational opportunities in many regions, and lack of state capacity were key drivers of child begging (TetraTech, 2020). However, attempts to push through state regulation of the religious boarding schools (*daaras*) that often require their students (*talibés*) to spend long hours begging in streets will likely find limited success. Even though some of the *Serignes Daara* who run these schools said they opposed forced begging, they are adamantly opposed to state oversight and tend to be trusted members of their communities. Further, these religious authorities and many parents interviewed believe that some degree of begging is an integral part of children’s education. These findings suggest that cultural norms can, in some cases, be barriers to certain C-TIP efforts. That said, the report highlighted an initiative by the NGO ENDA Jeunesse Action, which brought parents and community members from the region of Kolda, which supplies many *talibés*,

to witness firsthand living conditions at *daaras* in the urban center of Saint-Louis. This experience was enough to prompt many to pull their children out of such schools and instead set up *daaras* locally, which, as of the report's writing two years after the NGO's program, were still in operation. This experience suggests that educational efforts can find some success in combating C-TIP.

Again, youth involvement in conflict is often a driving factor in TIP. In the context of countering violent extremism (CVE) work, training youth leaders in marginalized communities while emphasizing peacebuilding and conflict-mitigation practices has proven effective (O'Neil & Van Broeckhoven, 2018). This general approach can be enhanced by supporting long-term, youth-led leadership initiatives grounded in local youth organizations; focusing on creating practical learning experiences and training youth of conflicting groups together as facilitators; creating spaces for youth civic engagement and local policymaking; incorporating inter-generational dialogues into leadership programs; and providing technical support and capacity building to youth-led local organizations. Some of these practices were included at a more general level in USAID's Mali Shared Governance Program, which sought to increase women's participation in planning and budgeting for community activities, thereby strengthening community resilience.

Promising practices to facilitate youth disengagement from violent groups include community-led disengagement where other youth, former combatants, and religious leaders are involved and engaging families, particularly mothers, as protagonists. Family-based social networks can also be important in that process.

While these approaches are promising and relevant to prevent youth joining armed groups or to foster their disengagement with these groups, they are also broadly in agreement with the practices noted earlier and in the interviews. They are therefore likely to be translatable to the context of youth programming to prevent and combat TIP more broadly, along with the use of Positive Youth Development (PYD) practices. Focusing on the development of local youth leadership and organizations also aligns well with the findings from a Freedom Fund literature review on behavior change campaigns (Freedom Fund, 2019) that found the gap between attitude change and behavior change is narrower for face-to-face interventions than for media interventions.

KEY FINDINGS

- Community level mobilization is the most common form of youth recruitment to armed groups – particularly in the context of the state's inability to offer security and rule of law. Motivations for migration and child labor are complex and include family and individual strategies and goals.
- There are potential avenues for collaboration between Islamic schools and secular schools that might increase schooling access for populations in occupied territories and among populations hostile to secular schooling.
- A number of published sources reinforced findings from the qualitative work, which emphasized child trafficking is driven by a complex set of social, cultural, historic, and economic factors. Effective programming to address this issue must therefore account not only for individual vulnerabilities and characteristics but also consider the family and community contexts.

- Holistically designed youth-oriented interventions are particularly needed to inform communities about the risks of child trafficking, including programming involving income generation, economic opportunities, psychological support, and community engagement.
- Evidence suggests the development of local youth leadership programs and the introduction of face-to-face behavior change campaigns are useful mechanisms through which to counter TIP.

LEGAL TRAINING TO INCREASE PROSECUTION OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

The document review on this thematic area yielded few documents and did not yield any rigorous evaluations matching the scope of this research. However, the team uncovered a few performance evaluations of large programs where training of judicial and law enforcement actors was only a small part of a multi-pillar approach. Their findings on those trainings are reported below and should be viewed as recommendations derived from primarily qualitative studies and evaluations, meaning they may be valuable for program design consideration but should be treated as empirically unproven. However, many were reinforced and confirmed via the qualitative research component.

As previously noted, KII respondents felt that low awareness of existing laws, a dearth of external funding for their implementation, and a weak penal code are primarily responsible for impeding the enforcement of existing laws against trafficking.

KII respondents noted several cases of TIP that went unaddressed due to a lack of proper training and sensitization, including victim identification. This recurring perspective in our interviews suggest issues with scale and sustainability of legal training. Indeed, documents reviewed show that training programs focused on improving knowledge and skills of judges and prosecutors have been implemented in Mali, although evaluations were not conducted or were not made available.

For example, as part of the UNODC's Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants (GLO.ACT), a training workshop for judges was organized in late 2018 in Sikasso, Mali. This workshop brought together 25 magistrates and prosecutors from all regions of the country and sought to improve their knowledge of national and international legal frameworks related to the smuggling of migrants, as well as techniques for investigating and prosecuting cases related to smuggling.

Training programs targeting law enforcement (police, gendarmerie, TIP-specific units, etc.) were also uncovered in Mali. For example, a training session for the Brigade for the Suppression of the Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons and the judicial police officers of the Malian National Police and Gendarmerie was held in March 2020 as part of the UNODC's and OHCHR's PROMIS Project. Similar programs were also found in nearby countries, including a training focused specifically on training trainers of law enforcement academies and institutes in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger in 2015.

Based on the limited information available, these programs tend to cover a broad range of types of TIP but focus particularly on TIP related to commercial sexual exploitation, migrant smuggling for forced labor, and forced begging. One notable exception was GLO.ACT, which included a training component on trafficking of children by armed groups in Niger and Mali, although it was mostly related to improving the treatment of these children.

Interviews with the Mali Justice Project (MJP), funded by USAID, also confirmed that the project provided and continues to provide training to judges, prosecutors, investigative officers, labor inspectors, and social workers. The project also highlighted the importance of mentoring as a more sustained form of capacity building for actors in the justice system and in law enforcement. Another approach focused on sustainability and highlighted by MJP and in documents was the integration of TIP and GBV modules in the official training curriculum of these actors. MJP is currently working on this, although the process is long and sometimes difficult.

The importance of networking was also noted in both interviews and the documents reviewed. Networking is considered important to sustain and reinforce trainings and, in fact, is one of the four pillars of the Mali National TIP Action Plan. Most respondents agreed the primary strength of the Malian state framework and existing legislation is in its influence in networking and working through NGOs. However, opinions diverged on the efficacy of this network. The value of networking is strong when training a specific type of actors (e.g., prosecutors from different regions) but possibly even stronger when holding trainings that regroup heterogeneous sets of participants, such as state and non-state actors, as noted by one interviewee.

The emphasis on practical skills also emerged across both the literature and KIIs. Trainings should cover legislations and frameworks but are viewed as more effective when they incorporate practical skills that are of immediate and direct use to participants. Practical components can include dramatized scenes of trafficking and smuggling and interactive scenarios that place participants in situations that mirror their professional responsibilities, requiring them to act in that context and with the benefit of what they have learned.

Qualitative work, including with NGOs working in the northern region of Mali and the regions of Bamako and Gao, also highlighted the need for activities designed to counteract stigma around trafficking and exploitation, as the current sociocultural environment makes reintegration challenging. The KIIs further illuminate the acute need for funding and resource allocations by the GOM, which was noted to affect C-TIP broadly, including activities such as trainings and investigations.

KEY FINDINGS

For this thematic area, qualitative interviews yielded richer information than the evidence review. The takeaways below reflect these results:

- Training provided by the GOM to legal and law enforcement actors is seemingly insufficient or lacking. International funding has been directed towards such trainings in Mali, but evidence of their effectiveness was not uncovered due to lack of rigorous evaluation. Interviewees wished for greater financial support from the government in this area, in addition to streamlined resource allocation.
- Respondents recommended training programs for individuals working in the C-TIP space in ministries and official spaces, facilitation of access to appeal and providing testimony for victims, and improved reaction mechanisms for assisting in immediate needs for rescues and rehabilitation. Donor coordination and coordination with national agencies are also important to reduce the risk of training fatigue, which may arise due to potential duplication of training.

- Training and outreach should prioritize geographical hot spots for TIP and should also be designed to cover practical skills and the use of on-the-job knowledge. Additionally, training should be prepared to foster networking and consider and overcome problematic attitudes and cultural notions that may exist among judicial and law-enforcement actors.
- The importance of coordination between existing NGOs and CSOs working in the C-TIP space was also highlighted. According to one respondent, “At the NGO and CSO level, their coverage is highly uneven across the geography, and the lack of presence of the state in certain regions makes their work quite challenging.” Finally, consideration of targeted support for different forms of TIP is also necessary: one respondent considered this particularly necessary for victims of descent-based slavery.
- Suggestions to improve policies regarding trafficking included capacity-building workshops for magistrates and legal professionals, as well as awareness campaigns on the intricacies of existing laws. Policymakers should also be included in capacity-building programs.
- Respondents mentioned the challenges associated with prosecution to be closely connected with corruption. According to one key informant, “The big [trafficking] networks are known, but the law does not act [on prosecuting these].”
- While national agencies with a mandate to combat TIP typically already have significant experience in performing that activity, they have much less knowledge and understanding of “following the money” – the knowledge and expertise to conduct forensic finance and financial investigations and an awareness of the importance of anti-money-laundering activities. Training and capacity-building in this area can be critical for successful C-TIP enforcement and prosecution.
- The use of Training of Trainers (ToT) and the integration of training modules on topics such as C-TIP and investigative procedures on transnational organized crimes in police and judiciary schools’ curricula have been found to foster sustainability by helping to overcome the high turnover among those who dispense and receive training. These modules should thus be viewed as a potential training resource. Trainings should also include “practical” components for situations law enforcement officials and NGO staff might encounter in order to appropriately sensitize them.
- Activities designed to counteract stigma around trafficking and exploitation are also viewed as necessary, as the current sociocultural environment makes reintegration challenging. One respondent even noted their organization had received death threats when a rescue had been planned to remove an underage girl from a brothel. Mechanisms providing legal aid and rehabilitation assistance to victims are thus viewed as vital in reintegration.

TIP REDUCTION IN NEXUS CONTEXT (HUMANITARIAN, DEVELOPMENT, AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM)

The worsening security situation in Mali not only has implications for levels of trafficking in the future but can also hinder the success of planned or ongoing interventions. The report introduction highlighted the dynamic and worsening security situation in Mali, particularly in the country’s north. Insecurity and violence were also mentioned throughout the KII as both drivers of trafficking and barriers to effective programming. Our review found a relatively rich literature on the nexus between insecurity and TIP in

Mali compared to the other themes, including a number of rigorous evaluations of mental health interventions for children affected by conflict.

An evaluation of the Rapid Education Risks Assessment program in Mali provides valuable insight into the impact of insecurity on the education sector in Mali, including issues related to child trafficking. The mixed-methods research with a variety of stakeholders in the education system found political instability generated distrust among parents about schooling. The evaluation also found flight of teachers from conflict-affected areas, heightened food and economic insecurity, risk to children from the continued presence of armed groups, increased mobility of populations due to insecurity, and targeting of some schools by jihadist groups. Factors associated with resilience included communities' negotiations with armed groups to keep schools open, parental chaperones of students to school in the context of insecurity, and the development of local-level incentives to keep teachers on site.

A number of studies in the first-round review used qualitative and secondary data to look at drivers and consequences of youth recruitment to insurgent groups (Bleck, Boisvert & Sangaré, 2018; Darden, 2019; Thérout-Bénoni et al., 2016). Increasing insecurity promises to exacerbate the recruitment of children into armed groups – a problem that was already ascendent in Mali (Darden, 2019). Community-level mobilization was cited as the primary avenue that children are recruited into non-state groups (Bleck, Boisvert & Sangaré, 2018), with parental involvement in armed groups as another major risk factor (Darden, 2019). Other factors mentioned in the literature included lack of territorial control by the state, which fed into communities' perceived needs to protect themselves; individuals' hopes for increased income; and individuals' status-seeking. Kidnapping and coercion are also avenues into armed groups, and one study particularly noted the role of Koranic schools in recruitment of children. This was a concern raised in the majority of KIs, as well. Both the literature and the qualitative research note students living away from home in Islamic schools may be particularly vulnerable to recruitment.

This theme had the richest findings from the second round of literature review. A number of studies examined the impact of mental health programming for children associated with armed groups or more broadly affected by conflict. Some found interventions that improve the economic and psychological conditions of youth in conflict contexts could have positive downstream effects on their likelihood of being trafficked, as youth or adults.

In the second-round review, two documents measured the downstream impact of conflict on children who were associated with armed groups. One reported on behavioral games intended to measure trust among former child soldiers in Liberia (Trussell, 2018), with findings showing that those who started fighting as children were less trusting than those who started as adults; they were about equally as trusting as non-soldiers. Intriguingly, those who had gone through a reintegration program were less trusting than those who had not. However, lessons learned from such studies are limited, as individuals were not randomly assigned to either conflict or the reintegration program; in other words, it is quite possible – even likely – individuals' pre-existing levels of trust affected decisions to engage in conflict and/or participate in reintegration.

Some researchers have attempted to address these issues of determining causal effects by using matching techniques, which compare groups that are statistically equivalent on a range of observable factors, with the only difference being experience in conflict. One document reported results of such analyses using a cohort study on former child soldiers in Nepal (Kohrt et al., 2008). After adjusting for traumatic exposures, the researchers found former child soldiers had higher levels of depression and

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but not higher levels of general psychological difficulties, anxiety, or functional impairment. Again, however, these findings are limited by the fact the study could only include those who returned home after experiences as child soldiers; the profiles of those who did not return to their community might have been very different.

Given these apparent negative consequences – which could feed into later experience with human trafficking – researchers have attempted myriad interventions to address the needs of these vulnerable populations. Multiple documents reported on different kinds of therapy, including cognitive behavioral, narrative exposure, and creative expression therapy on children and youth affected by conflict, often as child soldiers. Of these, three of the studies reviewed found at least one version of the therapy offered had some significant, positive effects on psychological well-being (e.g., depression, aggression, PTSD, anxiety) and educational attainment. A study from Sierra Leone highlighted the importance of cognitive behavioral therapy, noting educational subsidies offered to war-affected youth had no long-term effects unless paired with the therapy (Betancourt et al., 2014). Similarly, a study in Uganda found subjects offered narrative exposure therapy performed better than those who were offered an “academic catch-up program” (Ertl, Pfeiffer, Schauer, Elbert & Neuner, 2011). In other words, increased opportunities for education alone might not have desired consequences.

One study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on female former child soldiers found a form of narrative exposure therapy produced better outcomes than “normal” therapy, suggesting the types of therapy offered to former combatants should be tailored to achieve maximum benefit for specific groups (Robjant et al., 2019). Some programs’ lack of specific tailoring might partly explain the findings documented in one meta-analysis, which found interventions involving different types of therapy for school-aged refugees, asylum seekers, or immigrants with war trauma diverged significantly in their ability to produce desired outcomes (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016).

One document reviewed reported on an RCT in which staff for child protective services (in the United States), rather than vulnerable youth, were the focus (McMahon-Howard & Reimers, 2013). This study found a webinar on commercial sexual exploitation of children increased staff members’ ability to identify risk factors, knowledge about local laws and services, and reported willingness to refer victims and at-risk children to specialized services. However, it is unclear whether such training would have similar efficacy among individuals who do not already have significant experience in child protection; the numbers of such individuals are likely to be low in contexts like Mali.

Violent conflict is not the only potential driver of youth into trafficking, however. While it is a potential consequence of trafficking, child labor could also drive youth into trafficking by reducing their educational opportunities, removing youth from support networks, and challenging enforcement of children and youth rights, more generally. One document reviewed focused on the causes of child labor, while another examined the impacts. With regard to the former, one study used difference-in-differences to study how violence, varying over time and across governorates in Iraq, related to changes in child labor (Naufal, Malcolm & Diwakar, 2018). It found armed conflict intensity was associated with increased likelihood of economic child labor (i.e., employment outside of the household) but not with changes in household labor. However, it is unclear whether the causal effects here are well-identified, and the second round of document reviews identified no literature on mechanisms driving any relationship between conflict and child labor, which might include negative income shocks, displacement, and reduction in educational opportunities and quality.

KEY FINDINGS

- Insecurity and violence were found to be contributors to TIP, as well as barriers to creating effective programming counteracting TIP.
- Some factors identified with resilience in these communities included: communities' negotiations with armed groups to keep schools open, parental chaperones of students to school in the context of insecurity, and the development of local-level incentives to retain teachers at conflict-affected schools.
- Interventions improving the economic and psychological conditions of youth in conflict contexts could have positive downstream effects on their likelihood of being trafficked, as youth or adults.
- A number of studies highlighted the importance of providing psychological support and social reintegration for children affected by conflict. These studies also emphasized the importance of creating approaches adapted to the specific environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

This section synthesizes lessons learned and key programmatic takeaways, drawing on the desk review as well as expert input. The literature review and KIs generated three core recommendations, which cross-cut the thematic areas.

First, C-TIP programming must be holistic in design, both in terms of inclusion of stakeholders and topics addressed. The issue of TIP is the result of myriad forces, with a range of economic, social, and political actors driving this form of abuse. Individuals become vulnerable to trafficking for multiple reasons, including resource poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities, patriarchal norms, and the economic, social, and psychological legacies of violent conflict. Programming focused on only one set of actors, whether they be potential victims from a certain segment of the population, policymakers working on a narrow range of issues, or actual or potential perpetrators from particular communities, is unlikely to achieve desired outcomes. Interventions targeted at only one potential driver of TIP are likely to have marginal impacts.

The report highlights how multiple forms of C-TIP programming can intersect to enable the kind of holistic efforts recommended. For instance, awareness-raising promotes recognition of TIP, creates buy-in for TIP prevention and C-TIP programming, and builds skills among actors who prevent or respond to TIP. Literature and KIs identified interventions that focus on various levels as vital for creating successful youth programming. Similarly, the nexus of instability and humanitarian crisis in Mali was cited as a key driver for child trafficking and youth vulnerability. Lessons learned from other crisis-affected settings could be adapted and potentially applied in the Mali context. While Mali may not have large numbers of reintegrating child soldiers, the lessons learned from programming with such conflict-affected youth have relevance: combining psychosocial programming with economic integration and community sensitization was a successful model holding promise in the Malian context. The common thread is that these kinds of programming show potential for sustainable and positive change are multifaceted and involve multiple sets of stakeholders, including national and local government officials,

security and armed actors, educators, the media, civil society, victims of trafficking, and community members. C-TIP programming will likely only find success with adequate buy-in from all of these sets of actors.

For example, in Mali, religious leaders are important actors, at both the local and national level, and religious organizations are an integral part in many Malians' lives. In addition, Afrobarometer survey data from 2020 suggest that Malians trust religious and traditional leaders significantly more than they trust national authorities, such as the President and the national assembly.¹³ Engagement of religious authorities and organizations is therefore likely crucial in such a context. Few interventions covered by the literature review discussed partnerships with such individuals or organizations, preferring instead to work with secular CSOs. Including religious authorities and organizations in the set of stakeholders could prove essential to project success, especially when interventions involve trying to affect norms in rural communities.

Another set of actors lies in the GOM, which is at a critical crossroads in its C-TIP programming. The past decade has seen significant advancements in the codification of laws and policies related to TIP at the national level. Organizations monitoring trafficking have noted Mali has made improvements in recent years, but significant progress remains necessary. Low awareness of these laws and policies, a lack of funding, and a weak penal code hinder the realization of effective C-TIP programming in the country. Therefore, capacity-building at the government and local level was widely recommended. This can include training programs for individuals working in the C-TIP space in ministries and other official bodies, facilitation of access to appeal and denunciation processes for victims, and improved reaction mechanisms for assisting in immediate needs for rescues and rehabilitation.

Second, the literature and KIs often stressed the need for interventions to be context-specific. Actors working in the C-TIP space face a challenge. On one hand, the literature review identified dozens of studies on topics directly or indirectly related to TIP. Many of these efforts provide valuable insights into the causes and effects of TIP, as well as recommendations – some of it based on rigorous evaluation – for strategies to address the phenomenon and its long- and short-term consequences. These lessons can provide guidance for future C-TIP design efforts in Mali. On the other hand, the number of studies focused on Mali, in particular, was somewhat limited, particularly when it comes to rigorous evaluations of C-TIP initiatives. Practitioners should be wary of therefore drawing quick assumptions that the factors driving C-TIP in other contexts are also at play in Mali and that interventions having particular effects in contexts as diverse as the United States, Nepal, and even Liberia, Senegal, and Nigeria will have similar impacts in Mali.

KIs and meta-analyses, in particular, pointed to the need for C-TIP efforts to simultaneously draw on existing knowledge but also be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of local contexts, both in terms of what applies specifically to Mali, as well as what applies to different communities and populations within Mali. Here, a holistic approach will again be especially helpful, as the broadest range of actors with local insights, knowledge, and experience will need to be consulted at ideation, design, implementation, and evaluation phases. These actors' input can help ensure a project reaches targeted individuals and communities, uses culturally and situationally appropriate messaging or resources, and addresses stakeholders' needs and preferences. Such a strategy can increase the probability a project achieves

¹³ Afrobarometer press release, « Les Maliens ont moins confiance envers le Président de la République et les institutions étatiques qu'envers les chefs traditionnels et religieux », August 2020; available [here](#).

desired outcomes, as well as improve efficiency and reduce the probability of unintended negative consequences.

Such background knowledge is quite important in the Malian context. TIP-related challenges exist upon a backdrop of rapidly deteriorating security. Regular attacks, ongoing intercommunal violence, fighting among armed groups, and terrorist threats have created a protracted humanitarian crisis, which is further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Successful interventions must take this complex set of challenges into account.

Further, local knowledge will help identify priority communities, which vary from context to context. There was clear consensus among key informants that, in Mali, children should be the priority group for C-TIP programming. Children are disproportionately vulnerable to multiple forms of TIP and are highly affected by the increasing instability. A UNICEF report estimated children compose nearly two-thirds of the displaced population (UNICEF, 2020). And the UN Global Protection Cluster notes increasing violence and overlapping crises in Mali are exacerbating existing abuse while fueling new forms of trafficking, including trafficking children for labor in gold mines and for recruitment and use by armed groups (Global Protection Cluster, 2020).

Finally, the literature review highlighted the need for adequate resources and attention for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in all C-TIP interventions. While interventions utilizing holistic approaches and grounding their designs in the needs of local communities show particular promise, the literature review uncovered a relatively small number of rigorous evaluations of C-TIP programming, particularly in the Sahel. Many studies used rigorous designs, such as RCTs or quasi-experiments, to evaluate programs' effects, but most focused on areas indirectly related to TIP, such as psychosocial trauma in former child soldiers. Interventions to raise awareness about the drivers and dangers of irregular migration were especially likely to use rigorous evaluation strategies – and many did show promising effects, in terms of increasing knowledge and reducing stated desire to migrate – but the long-term consequences of most of these interventions could not be evaluated. This highlights an important point: in many instances, M&E exercises would do best to extend far beyond the length of the intervention period, although this can pose challenges with regards to logistics of tracking participants, investigator attention, and available resources. Effects that decay in the short and medium term may have limited impact on longer-term reductions in TIP. Ultimately, interventions without rigorous M&E plans suffer on a number of levels, including inability to determine whether resources were utilized efficiently and effectively, to formulate lessons that can be drawn on for future programming, and to identify potential unintended negative consequences.

These three lessons cross-cut all five thematic areas; the following section highlights the key lessons from each individual area.

PLATFORMS FOR VICTIMS AND SERVICES FOR POPULATIONS VULNERABLE TO TIP

- Key informant information and the literature both emphasize the importance of leveraging local structures of care that currently exist and often drawing upon family and women's social networks to create holistic, sustainable, and successful responses. There are community responses to child labor and trafficking that could be used as the basis for developing such structures of care, provided those community responses were better understood.

- Working with local representatives in order to foster good faith in communities that have low levels of willingness to participate in anti-TIP activities is also an important avenue for trust building and awareness raising, particularly in more vulnerable regions.
- Trafficking in children and child labor appear to be prevalent phenomena. However, a limited number of interventions targeting children and women have been documented, and even fewer have been rigorously evaluated, underscoring the need for these studies.
- The factors leading to child labor in Mali are distinct from the contexts of urban factory work often targeted by interventions and studies examining child labor globally. In Mali, child trafficking occurs in the broader context of the culturally grounded rural exodus to cities or large towns, where abuse could occur during work in informal sectors, such as artisanal gold mining.
- There is limited implementation of initiatives attempting to decrease sexual violence and conflict, despite efforts made towards policies to address the same. Additionally, the severe lack of rigorous evaluations of existing interventions makes gauging their efficacy more difficult due to a lack of evidence

AWARENESS RAISING

- There are a very limited number of rigorous evaluations conducted on awareness-raising interventions. However, some evidence suggests, at least in the short term, such awareness campaigns can improve knowledge about TIP and reduce desire to engage in it. While these studies have been conducted outside of Mali, they still provide learning that can inform the design and evaluation of future interventions in this context.
- Some community- and national-level awareness campaigns have already been implemented in Mali in recent years, on topics ranging from public health and the judicial system to the responsibilities and performance of local government. Research from other contexts suggests these kinds of interventions show promise for improving knowledge and possibly supporting behavior change.
- Respondents in qualitative research supported the call for increasing awareness about the signs of trafficking among multiple sets of actors: community members, local elected officials, and armed and security forces. Another key informant noted radio and communication campaigns were particularly effective since illiteracy is widespread in many affected communities.
- Vulnerability to TIP might be most prevalent in those very areas where awareness campaigns are most challenging to implement. Drawing on methods that have wide dissemination and do not require in-person meetings (such as radio and social media) may be a promising option to overcome deteriorating security.

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

- Community-level mobilization is the most common form of youth recruitment to armed groups – particularly in the context of the state’s inability to offer security and rule of law. Motivations for migration and child labor are complex and include family and individual strategies and goals.

- A number of published sources reinforced findings from the qualitative work, which emphasized child trafficking is driven by a complex set of social, cultural, historic, and economic factors. Effective programming to address this issue must therefore account not only for individual vulnerabilities and characteristics but also consider the family and community contexts.
- Holistically designed youth-oriented interventions are particularly needed to inform communities about the risks of child trafficking, including programming involving income generation, economic opportunities, psychological support, and community engagement.
- Evidence suggests the development of local youth leadership programs and the introduction of face-to-face behavior change campaigns are useful mechanisms through which to counter TIP.

LEGAL TRAINING TO INCREASE PROSECUTION OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

- Organizations participating in this research mentioned financial support from the government and streamlined resource allocation would be helpful to their efforts, as currently most organizations rely on international funds.
- Respondents recommended training programs for individuals working in the C-TIP space in ministries and official spaces and improved reaction mechanisms for assisting in immediate needs for rescues and rehabilitation.
- Training and outreach should prioritize geographical hot spots for TIP, to foster networking and consider and overcome problematic stigmas that may exist among judicial and law-enforcement actors about vulnerable populations.
- The importance of coordination between existing NGOs and CSOs working in the C-TIP space was also highlighted. Finally, consideration of targeted support for different forms of TIP is also necessary – one respondent considered this particularly necessary for victims of descent-based slavery.
- The integration of training modules on topics such as C-TIP and investigative procedures on transnational organized crimes in police and judiciary schools' curricula have been found to foster sustainability by helping to overcome the high turnover among those who dispense and receive training. These should be viewed as a potential training resource. Training should also be appropriately altered to fit contextual needs of different situations, such as victim identification and perpetrator conviction.

TIP REDUCTION IN NEXUS CONTEXT (HUMANITARIAN, DEVELOPMENT, AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM)

- Environments with high levels of political insecurity and violence were typically found to be contributors to TIP, in addition to also hindering the creation and efficacy of C-TIP programming.
- Some factors identified with resilience in these communities included: communities' negotiations with armed groups to keep schools open, parental chaperones of students to

school in the context of insecurity, and the development of local-level incentives to retain teachers at conflict-affected schools.

- Several studies identified in this round examined the impact of mental health programming for children affected by conflict; findings from these suggest that interventions improving the economic and psychological conditions of youth in conflict contexts could have positive effects on their likelihood of being trafficked. However, since these individuals were not randomly assigned in their studies, it is possible pre-existing levels of trust affected decisions to engage in conflict and/or participate in reintegration.
- Research focused on sex trafficking primarily highlights the importance of civic education campaigns to combat exploitation. Some studies also highlight children coming from vulnerable backgrounds, including those in foster care and domestic work, are at particularly high risk for abuse.
- Research also highlighted educational subsidies offered to war-affected youth had no long-term effects unless paired with therapy and that a separate group of child soldiers who were offered narrative exposure therapy performed better than those offered an “academic catch-up program.” In other words, increased opportunities for education alone might not have desired consequences.

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ANNEX A: RECENT POLITICAL AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS IN MALI

In this section, we summarize some of the key recent political and security developments in Mali over the last 15 years. This information serves both to frame and contextualize the recommendations in this report, and to explain the evolution of TIP in the country. Indeed, the presence and strength of the state in different parts of the country and its ability to maintain security and enforce laws interacts with TIP. Politics can be viewed as cross-cutting with TIP, as governments have shifted priorities in terms of program funding and law enforcement over time and across regions to appease or reward certain ethnic and political groups.

2015 PEACE AGREEMENT

In March 2012, a group of soldiers overthrew the democratically elected government of President Amadou Toumani Touré, ostensibly over his poor handling of a separatist rebellion involving the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) from the minority Tuareg ethnic community, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and several other loosely aligned groups in the country's north. The rebel alliance collapsed rapidly, and AQIM asserted control over most of the north of the country. After France intervened militarily against the Islamists in 2013 and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) deployed, the MNLA and other factions reasserted control over some of the areas in the north. That same year, the post-coup political transition ended with the election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Kéïta.

In 2015, Kéïta's administration signed a peace deal with two northern armed coalitions: one led by ex-separatists and another by pro-unity groups. This deal was meant to address northern political grievances, reestablish state control and authority in the north, and isolate certain groups designated as terrorists that were not party to the agreement and discussions leading to it. However, the 2015 peace agreement was never fully implemented, and there are some indications that government officials at times obstructed its implementation.

Some aspects of the peace deal might also have exacerbated the situation (Congressional Research Service, 2020). The deal ruled out federalism and changes to the secular nature of the Malian state. Concessions made to a small number of armed groups alienated others who continue to feel victimized by the government or signatory armed groups. In addition, the deal was structured between the State and groups in the north but did not address or anticipate ongoing armed struggles between groups in the north to control territory and trafficking routes.

To this day, state actors remain absent in much of the north, while signatory armed groups have not disarmed and continue to maintain parallel administrative structures in some areas. New armed groups have emerged since the signing of the peace deal, possessing their own perspective on the deal and the government. Monitoring surrounding the 2015 agreement also suggests some signatory groups have maintained ties with Jihadist groups and are involved in drug trafficking, ethnic violence, and misappropriation of aid. In addition, conflict increasingly spread to central Mali, which was not in the scope of the 2015 agreement, with hundreds killed in regions such as Mopti.

2020 COUP AND AFTERMATH

In August 2020, elements of the military launched their second successful coup d'état in less than a decade, in response to weeks of protests against the Kéïta administration. These protests were motivated by, and focused on, apparent interference in the early 2020 legislative elections, corruption scandals, economic hardship, and worsening insecurity. The Malian government responded to these protests with a violent crackdown, while regional heads of state unsuccessfully attempted to mediate.

Following the coup, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) began mediating discussions and the political transition. The junta agreed to hand power to a transitional government, which is to last for 18 months, until elections are held to restore democracy. The transitional government is also expected to continue to implement the 2015 peace agreement and to stabilize central Mali and combat terrorism.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the transitional government is the inclusion, for the first time, of four representatives of signatory armed groups as ministers. Representatives of numerous other armed groups have also been appointed to non-ministerial government positions. The role of the Malian military in the transitional government is also larger than in recent years. Military officers oversee ministries central to the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement, elections, and territorial reforms. Of the 20 regional governors appointed, 13 are from the military and four out of the five regions in the north are now governed by military or police officers. The current president, Bah Ndaw, served in the military for nearly 40 years and was Minister of Defense under Kéïta.

The transition government took some time to become fully operational, but in February 2021 the interim parliament began its first session and approved the government action plan proposed by the transitional prime minister, which sets out six priority areas, including institutional reforms, elections, and openness to dialogue with extremist groups. The present plan is for these elections to be held in March 2022, although this remains tentative. The National Transition Council faces several challenges as it seeks to pass priority legislation, review the Constitution, and continue to implement the 2015 peace agreement. In particular, some key groups are not represented, which likely will reduce the Council's legitimacy and operational capacity.

SECURITY AND VIOLENCE

Much of the country is still in the grip of violence and subject to regular attacks. Civilian populations are facing what looks like a protracted humanitarian crisis and are affected by intercommunal violence, fighting among armed groups, and terrorist threats. COVID-19 further exacerbated these challenges.

Islamist groups have consolidated, morphed, and become bolder, particularly since 2017. They have attacked UN, French, and government targets in Mali and neighboring countries, such as Burkina Faso and Niger. These groups have expanded their area of operation and not only thwarted efforts to regain state control of the north but also forced further pullbacks from the area. In one particularly striking example, one group attacked the European G5 Sahel Joint Force headquarters in Sévaré, in central Mali, and forced its relocation to Bamako. The Islamist groups' activities, including attacks on traditional leaders, officials, and those collaborating with the state and peacekeeping actors, have also forced the retreat of rival groups. This situation has hastened the pace of internal displacement in 2020, making one key tenet of the 2015 Agreement – supporting the safe return of refugees and displaced persons –

significantly more difficult to accomplish. Progress on security, institutional reforms, and the provision of basic services will all be needed to achieve this objective.

Children seemingly constitute most of the internally displaced population (around 62 percent, according to the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF]) and are particularly vulnerable (UNICEF, 2020). Many schools are closed due to the insecurity, further disrupting education and social life. At the same time, humanitarian actors are facing ongoing challenges to access the population and deliver aid. Their personnel have been targets of violence in various parts of the country (including Gao, Ménaka, Timbuktu, and Mopti regions), and blockades imposed by certain extremist groups have cut off access to certain areas (UN Security Council, 2021B). In some areas, such as Gao, intercommunal violence regularly flares due to groups competing to provide protection to businesses and collect taxes on gold mining. In other areas, such as Timbuktu, armed groups are actively competing to control certain *cercles*, and there are at times clashes between ethnic wings within these groups.

The United Nations (UN) Global Protection Cluster reports the crisis and resulting vulnerability are feeding new forms of trafficking, including trafficking children for labor in gold mines (particularly in Gao and Kidal) and for recruitment and use by armed groups. As a result, the number of documented cases of child trafficking increased in 2020 (Global Protection Cluster, 2020). One significant challenge for trafficking is that separatist, rebel, terrorist, criminal, and communal defense networks often overlap and share key nodes in Mali and in the Sahel more broadly. Gender-based violence (GBV) also remains high, which the UN attributes in large part to the prevailing impunity.

The violence and insecurity have also affected MINUSMA directly, as it is considered the most dangerous UN operation to serve in. There have been several attacks against MINUSMA in multiple parts of the country in the first four months of 2021 alone. These attacks occurred in the Timbuktu, Kidal, and Mopti regions and led to the death of more than 10 peacekeepers, as well as more than 50 injuries among UN peacekeeping staff (UN Security Council, 2021A). MINUSMA's mandate expires on 30 June 2021, although it is likely to be extended, given the current context.

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