

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



Gold miner in Warwéogo site checking gold content in collected ores. Photo: IOM 2019.

This research is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies conducted in three stages:

- **Individual interviews** with female & male gold mining workers (204)
- **Focus groups** with host communities, female & male gold mining workers, pit leading hand, female sex workers, unaccompanied minors, NGOs’ and CSOs’ representatives.
- **Qualitative interviews** with key informants (local authorities, site managers, pit owners, and associations’ representatives).

INTRODUCTION

In Burkina Faso, authorities identified in 2017 the existence of **448 artisanal mining sites in the country, producing almost ten tons of gold annually.** This “Burkinabe El Dorado” thus continues to attract many migrant workers from all parts of the country, as well as from other countries in West and Central Africa. Entire families, driven by the lack of economic opportunities in their regions of origin and eager to improve their incomes to better address their families’ needs, then engage in the extraction of the precious metal.

Successive droughts in 1973 and 1974, which severely affected the North and Centre of the country, pushed Burkinabe people to migrate to the mining regions of the South. Thus, **nearly one million people out of the 18 million inhabitants of Burkina Faso are said to live off gold mining.**

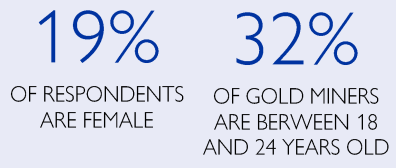
This research aims to determine the migration profile of gold miners and better understand the migration dynamics to and from targeted gold mining sites (incentive factors, departure movements, etc.) as well as the systems facilitating this mobility.

It also seeks to assess the challenges related to the protection of vulnerable people around the gold mining sites. Data collection took place **between March and April 2019 in two regions of Burkina Faso, the Galgouli (South-West) and Warwéogo (Centre-East) gold mining sites.**

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF GOLD MINERS

The population working in the gold mining sites is mostly young, with an average age of **30 years.** Three quarters (**74%**) of respondents in the sites are between 18 and 34 years old.

Before arriving at the sites, the vast majority of gold miners were working in the informal sector (65%) or looking for a job (18%).



Artisanal gold mining in Burkina Faso is generally practised by **rural communities from all regions of the country.** In the South-West, Mossi populations from the Plateau Central are in the majority. This activity is originally seasonal and performed between October and November, then from May to June (beginning of the rainy season).

“Gold mining has changed my economic situation, because before I had no activity that could provide me with an income. Now with gold mining, I can at least have something to eat. Gold mining has brought economic and social changes in our life.”

Focus group with female gold miners in the Warwéogo site, Centre-East Region.



MIGRATION JOURNEYS TO GOLD MINING SITES

In the two selected sites, almost all the gold miners are local workers or Burkinabe internal migrants (97%).

In Galgouli site, in the South-West region, 31% of the Burkinabe workers come from the same region but also from the North, Centre-North and Plateau Central, reflecting the significant internal mobility induced by gold mining activities.

64% of respondents worked in more than two gold sites.

31% of respondents in both sites have worked in the gold sites for more than three years.

Finally, gold miners from Burkina Faso also migrate extensively within the sub-region. They are the second largest group in Mali (32%) and represent 27% of gold miners in Guinea.

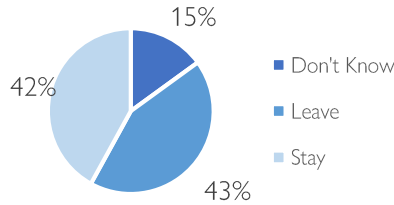
During the individual interviews, some gold miners stated that they had worked for more than ten years in different sites in the sub-region, including Mali, Ghana, and Niger. This shows the regional nature of gold mining, which has become an effective economic activity.

“I left the province of Sanmatenga (North Central Region). I went through five sites in the province of Sanmatenga without success, there were no job opportunities. The arable land is arid and insufficient in relation to the demographic pressure. [...] I saw friends who have succeeded thanks to gold mining. So I started this activity hoping that my situation would improve.”

Focus group with gold miners in Galgouli site, South-West Region.

The focus groups and interviews conducted with key informants and gold miners confirm that the main reasons for migration to the gold sites are both economic and social. Population pressure on arable land, poor rainfall leading to crop failures, or the “myth” of the gold digger’s success are key factors in decision-making.

MIGRATION INTENTIONS



Among gold miners wishing to leave the site (43%), 88% wish to return to their usual place of residence, and only 2% wish to attempt international migration to Europe.

FEMALE GOLD MINERS MIGRATION

“I came to the site after my husband’s death and found myself alone with three children. At home in the village, I had no one to rely on to take care of my children. When I heard about the gold mining site, I planned to go and work in order to get by and be able to take care of my children.”

Focus group with female gold miners from the Galgouli site, South-West region.

Women are mainly responsible for washing, crushing and rubble, grinding, transporting and sieving gravels or ores. Gold mining enables them to contribute to family expenses, school fees, food and other household needs.

Focus groups with female gold miners thus demonstrated an interesting dynamic of empowerment and shift in their role within the household, which is beneficial both to families and communities.

VIOLENCE, RISKS AND ABUSE IN GOLD MINING SITES

Gold mining sites are places of violence and many abuses. Fifty-five per cent (55%) of gold miners said they did not feel safe on sites.

In addition, 12% of the gold miners stated that they had been victims of various forms of abuse. Among the latter, exploitation at work, theft of property, ill-treatment, theft of working materials as well as physical and moral violence were the most frequently cited by gold miners.

LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF FEMALE SEX WORKERS

The majority of female sex workers met during the focus groups came from countries in the sub-region such as Nigeria or Togo. These women stated that they are often victims of violence, abuse, aggression, and stigmatization by clients.

They live in precarious conditions and lack access to health care and structures. Several Nigerian female nationals claimed to have arrived at the gold sites as sex workers without any prior information, although they hoped to obtain employment in trade or services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. GOVERNANCE AND PREVENTION

- Support the development of poverty reduction policies and programmes in gold miners’ communities of origin through the establishment of income-generating activities.
- Provide vocational training opportunities for young adults in gold miners’ communities of origin (Boulgou, Poni, Sanmatenga, Yatenga, Bam, and Zondoma).

2. MIGRANT ACCESS TO PROTECTION AND HEALTHCARE

- Support social action services for the protection and management of the voluntary return of migrants in difficulty.
- Initiate advocacy with state and non-state actors working in the field of protection to strengthen collaboration between community mechanisms and formal protection structures for migrants and children in mining sites.
- Improve access to health and care structures for gold miners and provide training for specialized health workers.