

GOLD RUSHES IN UPPER GUINEA
 GOLD MINING MIGRANTS’ JOURNEYS

This research was conducted under the project, “Protection and Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants in West and Central Africa” funded by the United States Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). This project aims to protect the most vulnerable migrants, including unaccompanied children, women and single mothers, victims of trafficking, and medical cases. The assistance provided under this project covers the entire West and Central Africa Region.



Koboni Gold Mining Site in Mandiana Préfecture. Photo IOM, 2019

This research is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, through a three-stage data collection process:

- **Individual interviews** with male and female gold miners (705).
- **Focus groups** with host communities, gold miners, pit leading hands, female sex workers, unaccompanied minors, NGOs and CSOs’ representatives.
- **Qualitative interviews** with key stakeholders (local authorities, site managers, pit owners, and associations’ representatives).

INTRODUCTION

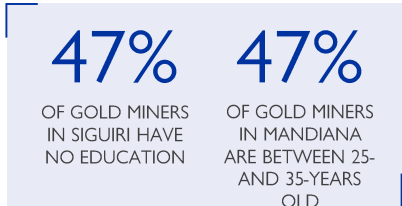
With an annual estimate of US\$300 million directly generated from artisanal gold mining in 2016, representing an artisanal gold that allegedly reach 15 tons per year, of which almost 90% is exported, particularly to China, the gold sector becomes a key driver of Guinea’s economic development.

Artisanal gold mining in Guinea is an ancestral activity that continues to attract migrants from all over the West African Subregion. Many men and women are driven by “gold fever”, the hope of earning swiftly incomes at gold mining sites to improve living conditions of their families, both in their communities of origin and at the sites.

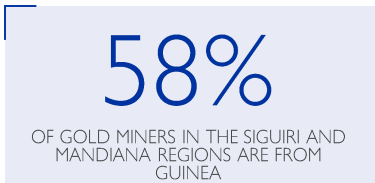
This research aims to determine the gold miners’ migration profile and better understand migration dynamics to/from targeted gold mining sites (incentive factors, initial movements, etc.) and the systems facilitating this mobility. It also seeks to assess challenges associated with protecting vulnerable people around gold mining sites. Data collection was conducted between March and May 2019, in East of Guinea, in both Siguiiri and Mandiana prefectures.

GOLD MINERS’ MIGRATION PROFILE

More than 50% of the respondents are young people between the ages of 18 and 35. Most have not completed primary school and have no vocational training. Fifty per cent (50%) of the gold miners (male and female) are married, and some migrated with their families. Thirty-six per cent (36%) of the respondents were self-employed and 31% were in the informal sector before reaching the gold mining sites.



Gold mining is considered as an opportunity to increase family incomes. It enables young people to achieve “well-being” and better “modern” lifestyle; contribute to addressing family needs or saving money to invest in an alternative professional project.



Mobility to gold mining sites in Guinea appears as a **seasonal migration**, taking place mainly during the dry season and stoppage of agricultural activities. This characteristic explains the high **inter-site mobility** of gold miners and their adaptability to opportunities from one season to another.



MIGRATION JOURNEYS TO GOLD MINING SITES

The majority (58%) of gold miners are internal migrants, 50% of whom come from the Kankan administrative region, where the research was conducted. Twenty-seven per cent (27%) of migrants come from Burkina Faso, and 10% from Mali.

Using mainly informal information channels, such as **word of mouth or contact with former gold miners**, 70% in Mandiana and 76% in Siguiri reported having contact on the site before arrival.

One of the specificities of gold miner migration flows is the high inter-site mobility. More than 60% of gold miners visited 2 or more sites.

Migration to gold mining sites is also short-term, with 36% of gold miners spending only between 2 weeks and 3 months at their current operating site.



UPSETS IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EQUILIBRIA LINKED TO MIGRATION TO GOLD MINING SITES

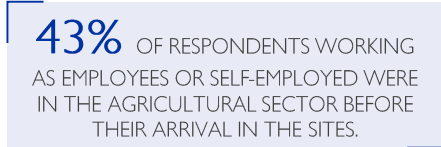
Gold mining offers many positive economic development opportunities for miners and surrounding communities, but it poses major risks to gold miners' lives as well as to the environment and host communities. In addition to the precarious living conditions in the sites and the high risk of incidents in mining pits, the expansion of gold mining destroys agricultural fields and reduces opportunities for income diversification.

“One of the main concerns is the massive presence of minors on sites.”

Interview with a representative of Guinean Red Cross in Mandiana Prefecture.

Interviews with host community members indicated an increase in insecurity as well as in conflicts with traditional authorities. Gold mining communities are creating new social

codes and increasing risky behaviour (drug and alcohol abuse), changing morals within communities and sometimes leading to violent confrontations.



FEMALE SEX WORKERS

The massive arrival of gold miners in Upper Guinea is linked with an increase in the number of female sex workers. They work with no protection mechanisms and are exposed to exploitation and aggressiveness from customers and their bosses. Social discrimination and lack of adequate care structures are a threat to their physical integrity and health. They are particularly exposed to sexually transmitted diseases due to the risky behaviour of their customers (refusal to use a condom).

“I live a very bad conditions. I work every day, but I don't earn much money and I'm afraid for my life. Everything I earn I give to my boss.”

Focus group with female sex workers in Balato, Kintinian District, Siguiri Prefecture.

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Child exploitation is a serious issue at gold mining sites and is of serious concern to civil society organizations. Their massive presence is reflected in school drop-outs, which result in an increase in illiteracy rates. The situation of young girls also is of concern as they are likely to be victims of trafficking networks. Further in-depth research is needed to better understand the conditions of underage boys and girls at the sites.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. GOVERNANCE AND PREVENTION

- Encourage the development of awareness and information programmes for male and female gold miners including unaccompanied minors and pregnant women on the dangers and risks associated with gold mining activities.
- Promote community dialogue mechanisms for a better representation of women in the governance structures of gold mining communities.
- Promote alternative activities in rural areas, such as agriculture or handicraft, to enable people to diversify their activities and stabilise their incomes.

2. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND SECURITY

- Establish health services adapted to the gold miners' needs.
- Support the Government in improving health facilities and access to drinking water.
- Establish control mechanisms for the mandatory use of protective equipment and ban the use of toxic products such as mercury

3. FEMALE SEX WORKERS AND UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

- Promote regional and cross-sectoral research to better address the vulnerability of female sex workers and unaccompanied minors.
- Conduct advocacy activities with the government on the issue of school drop-outs.
- Encourage the authorities to set up awareness-raising and information programmes on STDs and protection mechanisms for female sex workers.