* Population: 17.3 million (49,6% male; 50,4% female)[[1]](#endnote-2)
* Age disaggregation: <15yrs: 46.6%[[2]](#endnote-3)
* Average household size: 9 people/HH[[3]](#endnote-4)
* Female headed households: 10%[[4]](#endnote-5)
* Literacy Rates: >15yrs: 31%[[5]](#endnote-6)
* Infant mortality rates: 74.5 per 1000 live births[[6]](#endnote-7)
* Rate of Domestic Violence: 38% of women > 15 years experienced physical violence and more than 10% report sexual violence; 44% of women in relationships experienced violence (physical, sexual or emotional)[[7]](#endnote-8)

**Gender in Brief**

75.5% of the inhabitants in Mali live in rural areas and almost half of the Malian population is under 15 years old[[8]](#endnote-9). Poverty affects almost half of the population (57.6% of the rural population) with women being the most affected. Despite the commitments made by the Government, women are confronted with socio-cultural barriers that block their political participation, laws that continue to stymie their political engagement, and half-hearted implementation of policies established for the realization of their socio-economic and political rights. In 2015, the National Assembly was comprised of only 15 women out of a total of 147 parliamentarians (10%)[[9]](#endnote-10). The country is further confronted to food insecurity, lack of education, unchecked population growth, high rates of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), conservative religious traditions, and recent political instability that contribute to increasing marginalisation of women and girls. The northern part of the country is particularly vulnerable because of fewer infrastructures, ongoing conflicts that put women and girls in very difficult position to have access to social basic services like education, health and clean water.

**Traditional roles and responsibilities:** 41% of employed men work in agriculture and farming while 24% of women also work in this sector. Around 24% of women work in petty trading and selling (only 7% of men). A high percentage of women are likely to work without pay at all (27.2% of women as compared to 1.6% of men), and as a general fact, women earn lower incomes then men[[10]](#endnote-11). In 2013, female headed households possessed 84% less assets (including land) than male headed households. Other studies have shown that the majority of women in Mali only had access to land ownership through their husband[[11]](#endnote-12). Almost all women in male headed households are married (97%) and 77% of women in female headed households are widows. About half of women in general share their husband with another woman (48%)[[12]](#endnote-13). In terms of household roles, both men and women reported the attitude that caring for the home is a women's role, but these gender perceptions are changing with younger people getting higher education levels[[13]](#endnote-14).

**Employment and income:** Only 5% of women can freely circulate, which is a constraint on their capacity to participate in income generating activities[[14]](#endnote-15). Men are more likely than women to be salaried workers, even when other potentially influential factors such as educational attainment, age, marital status, structural/economic factors, region/place of residence, agency (political, economic and social), intergenerational aspects and aspirations are taken into account. This highlights decreasing paid employment opportunities for women. The Government is making efforts to increase women’s access to land property through the implementation of the Agricultural Framework Law (which included specific provisions for women, 30% of newly reclaimed and arable land available for women and young people), but this policy it is not well implemented.

**Education and literacy:** Mali is a country whose future is dependent on the development of the potential of its youth, making education a crucial element of development. School completion rates, while generally low, show an important gender disparity (29.1% for girls and 43% for boys). Literacy rates for young women (15-24 years) are 39% versus 56% for their male counterparts[[15]](#endnote-16). Only 28% of girls in rural areas go to school, versus 55% in urban areas. It can also be noticed that literacy rates are extremely low in female headed households (8.6%) in comparison to male headed households (44%)[[16]](#endnote-17).

**Gender equality, legislation and representation:** The Government of Mali has ratified various international laws and conventions for the protection of women’s and girls’ rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW, 1985) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (also referred to as the Maputo Protocol) in 2004. Mali also has a policy and legal framework conducive to the socio-economic development of women, including a National Gender Policy. The National Gender Policy of Mali was adopted by the government on 24 November 2010 to implement the key gender-related recommendations and guidelines in the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (GPRSP)[[17]](#endnote-18). Despite these various government commitments, the protection and promotion of women and girls’ rights in Mali remains largely theoretical. Social gender norms are highly inequitable and tend to maintain women in a position of inferiority to men. These inequalities affect several layers of the community and could be at the foundation of various inequitable practices with women and girls being the most impacted[[18]](#endnote-19). Patriarchal behaviours are anchored in women’s opinion on their own role within the family. About 75% of women and 58% of men admitted that the decisions within the household should be taken by the male chief[[19]](#endnote-20). This acceptance of gender inequality as normal and women’s inability to make decisions or claim their rights lead to high rates of gender-based violence, poor representation of women in decision-making bodies, and low women’s access to and control over land. Polygamy is also widely practiced and is legal under the country’s Marriage Code[[20]](#endnote-21).

**Gender-based and domestic violence:** Traditional values and practices, and slow progress on human rights adherence from the Government, religious institutions, and civil society create an environment in which gender relations remain deeply imbalanced and gender-based violence is endemic. Furthermore, the various inter-communal and inter-group conflicts that have become imbedded in Malian society, the rapid population displacements since the political instability of 2012, and the lawlessness of parts of the North has led to increased violence against women and girls. 69% of women have experienced psychological violence and almost one woman out of two has experienced physical or sexual violence[[21]](#endnote-22). Physical or sexual violence from spouse reached 34.6% in 2012-2013[[22]](#endnote-23). Women in Mali seldom report cases of domestic violence, particularly those in the rural and peri-urban areas. The percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who have undergone Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is estimated at 89% in Mali[[23]](#endnote-24). There is no specific law in Mali that criminalizes violence against women. Mali has also one of the highest child marriage prevalence rates in the world; on average, one out of two girls will be married by their 18th birthday[[24]](#endnote-25).

**Gender in emergencies:** Many schoolsthroughout the north of Mali are closed, either entirely or closed to girls because of the conflicts. The imposition of Sharia law by armed Islamist forces has robbed girls and women of their human rights and exposed them to physical and mental abuse. Young boys are equally vulnerable, as targets of forced recruitment or pressure to become martyrs in a cause they do not share. The challenge is to respond to the food and nutrition crisis, as well as to ensure the maintenance of basic social services and the protection of women and children in the context of an escalation in the conflict and increased flows of internally displaced people[[25]](#endnote-26).

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