



# Migration and development dynamics in Dialakoro, Guinea

Located near the Guinean border with Mali, Dialakoro has a tradition of short-term international mobility. Poor connections within Guinea have led to isolation and a lack of basic infrastructure.

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Most people in Dialakoro have some connection with migration, including their own direct experiences.

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Many of those who do migrate to another country 'follow the gold'. Small-scale mining is also an increasingly important factor for in-migration in Dialakoro.

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Migration to Europe is generally not seen as a model of success or upward social mobility, with most young adults preferring to stay in Dialakoro.



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Photo: Abdoulaye Somparé for MIGNEX.

Dialakoro is a rural sub-prefecture situated along the Niger river in the Kankan region of eastern Guinea. The area has experienced rapid expansion, with an estimated population of 70,000<sup>1</sup> that extends from the historic village of Dialakoro over several villages and around 1,000 small hamlets.

Although Dialakoro is quickly becoming a town, it lacks basic infrastructure. For instance, just under half of households that took part in the MIGNEX survey have electricity in their home (49%). It is poorly

connected to other parts of the country, which causes isolation and transportation challenges.

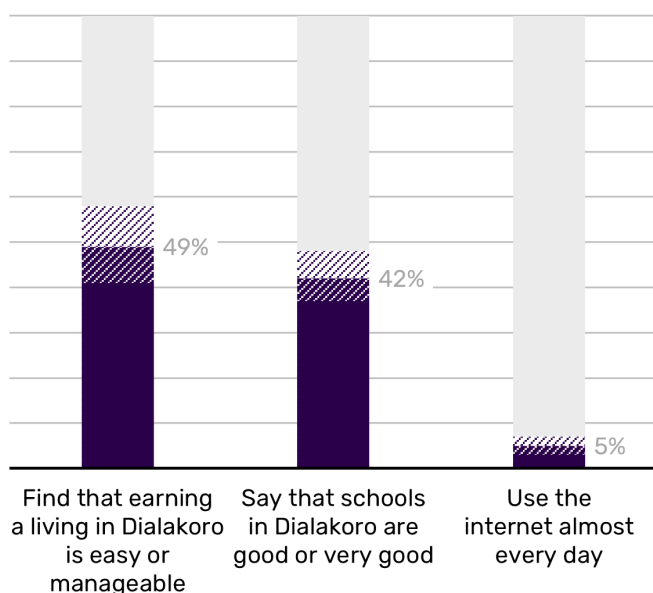
Almost two-thirds (61%) of surveyed young adults are working in agriculture. People farm together in collective fields belonging to paternal extended families, and young people are expected to contribute to this work even if they have other jobs.

Small-scale gold mining previously complemented agriculture but it has become an increasingly important source of income for young adults. Mining is not popular in Dialakoro, however. Many residents are concerned about the physical and environmental dangers, and for the social consequences related to the arrival of miners from other regions and countries.

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Boffa and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Guinea.<sup>2</sup>

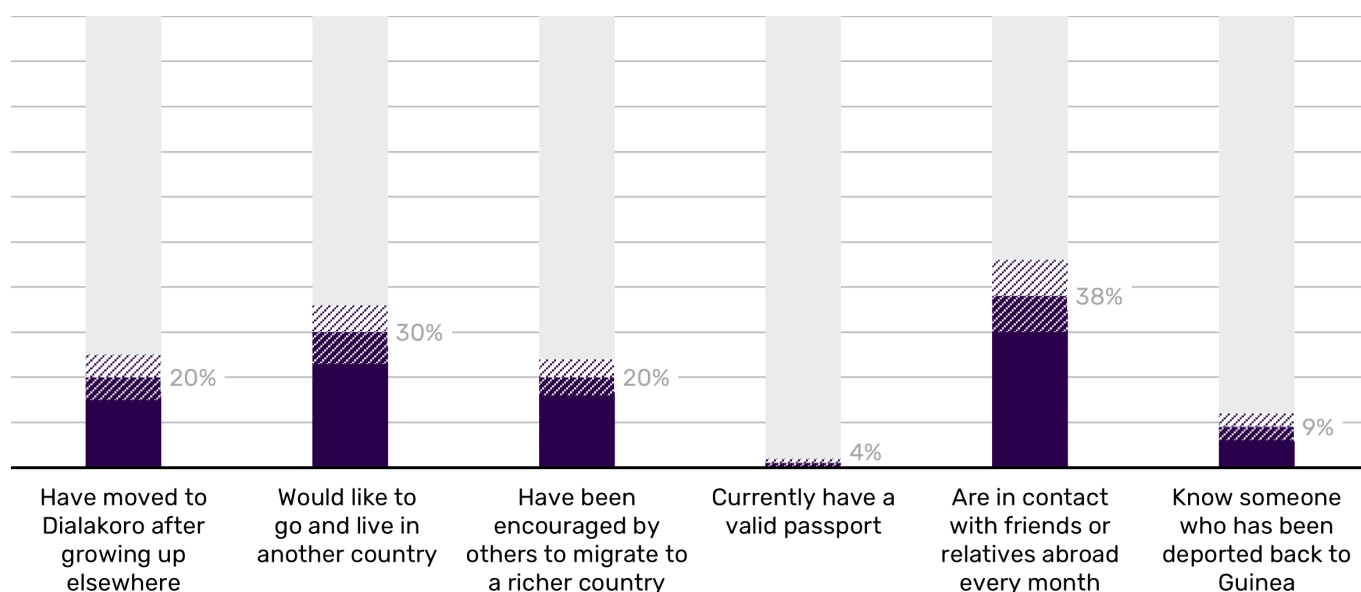
### Migration from Dialakoro

Due to the proximity of Dialakoro to the Guinea–Mali border, there is a tradition of migration to neighbouring countries for mining, often on a short-term or circular basis. However, this trend has changed with the introduction of mining machinery that allow for the exploitation of gold locally, and mining is becoming more of a daily, local activity for



**Figure 1. Indicators of development**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.



**Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics**

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

some. Others still move abroad for a few years to engage in mining, before returning to Dialakoro. Nearly half of the surveyed young adults (45%) have family or friends living abroad, predominantly in Mali (24%), Ivory Coast (20%) and France (16%).

Other aspects of international mobility form part of everyday life for many in Dialakoro. Bamako in Mali is the nearest major city and many travel there for health services and trade. Some social groups have strong cultural ties with mobility, such as the Sonomo, who deal with river transportation from Dialakoro to Bamako.

International migration to Europe or further away is less common and is not seen as particularly feasible – virtually none of the surveyed young adults (1%) own a valid passport. While France is the preferred international destination reported by young adults from Dialakoro (31%), many view irregular migration as an extremely dangerous option, especially after a young migrant from Dialakoro drowned in the Mediterranean Sea.

Internal migration is common. Two-thirds of young adults (66%) surveyed know someone from Dialakoro who moved within Guinea in the past five years. This includes seasonal workers in mining or plantations of the Forest region, civil servants and craftspeople migrating to bigger towns for apprenticeships or vocational training.

### Migration aspirations

Migration to Europe is generally not seen as a model of success or of upward social mobility in Dialakoro. Two-thirds of young adults (70%) indicated that they would prefer to stay in Guinea in the next five years.

While nearly two-thirds of young adults (62%) would migrate to a richer country if given the necessary papers, less than a third (28%) have seriously considered migrating internationally in the past year.

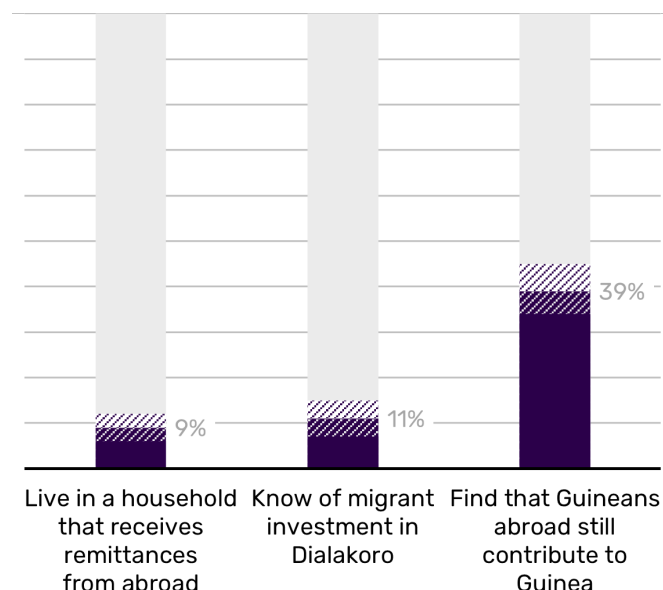
### Gender and migration

Feelings of optimism or confidence for the future vary amongst men and women in Dialakoro.<sup>3</sup> Men are more optimistic given the town's rapid expansion and new livelihood opportunities. Women often expressed frustration with gender relations, the heavy economic burden they carry, and a lack of support from government and development projects. This is one reason why women tend to be more optimistic about international

*Gold appears and disappears. When you are here, you learn that gold has appeared in Mali, Burkina or Ghana. Everybody hastens to those places.*

Focus group participant





**Figure 3. Migration–development interactions**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

migration: viewing it as way to improve living conditions, either for themselves or their sons.

In Dialakoro, 38% of surveyed young men and 25% of young women have lived abroad for at least one year. Mining was a common reason for both.

### In-migration

In-migration to Dialakoro is not common; most young adults (80%) grew up there. Of those who did not, the majority are internal migrants (15%). Most of these are teachers attracted by economic opportunities, often working as farmers, traders, and miners alongside teaching.

The small minority of international in-migrants (5%) tend to be miners from neighbouring countries who create temporary camps and move once the gold extraction is complete. There are tensions between local

residents and both types of in-migrants, particularly in the villages.

### Links between migration and development

Of those respondents who have family or friends abroad, most (71%) have monthly contact. No collective remittances or diaspora investments by international migrants were reported. While one-fifth of young adults' households with migrant family members, relatives or friends (20%) had received remittances in the past year, they were not the most important source of income for any household (0%). One development project, Kankan Cotton Project, aimed to increase the productivity of the cotton sector, in part by building new routes and rural tracks to Dialakoro. However, the roads have not been maintained and this isolation has impacted mobility. Unable to take the road, many cross the river on overloaded canoes, with risks for their security.

### Notes

1. *Plan de développement locale* for Dialakoro.
2. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Ester Botta and Abdoulaye Somparé in July–August 2021, assisted by Dougo Kpakpavogu, remotely collaborating with Gemma Hennessey and Jessica Hagen-Zanker. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39) was conducted by West African Field Services (WAFFS), PD Consult and ODI in July 2021. The fieldwork took place prior to the coup d'état in September 2021, when Alpha Condé was succeeded by a military regime. The people of Dialakoro were loyal supporters and beneficiaries of Alpha Condé's government. The atmosphere of hope that prevailed depended in part on these close ties.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration–Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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