

Rapid growth of Bamako linked to Internally Displaced Persons

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Abstract— Bamako is experiencing rapid demographic and spatial growth, driven by natural increase, internal migration, rural-to-urban migration, and the influx of internally displaced persons fleeing conflicts in central and northern Mali. This dynamic fuels the expansion of peripheral neighborhoods and places strain on housing, water, sanitation, transport, and social services. Based on fieldwork and statistical and spatial analysis, this study demonstrates that displaced persons also contribute to the urban economy through commercial, artisanal, and informal activities. Bamako's growth linked to internal displacement thus presents a humanitarian, urban, and social challenge.

Keywords--Bamako; internally displaced persons; periphery urbanization, migration, urban growth.

I. INTRODUCTION

African cities are experiencing rapid urbanization that is profoundly transforming territories, economies, and lifestyles. In Mali, this dynamic is particularly evident in Bamako, the country's political, economic, and administrative capital. The city is home to key public institutions, universities, hospitals, markets, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and transport networks. Bamako's growth stems from several factors. First, it is linked to natural population growth (RGH, 2009). Second, it is fueled by internal migration from rural areas and secondary towns. Finally, growth has accelerated with the arrival of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing insecurity, armed violence, and the loss of their livelihoods.

A distinction must be made between internal migrants and internally displaced persons (Adama Kone et al., 2020). Internal migrants generally move to seek employment, pursue education, join family members, or improve their living conditions. IDPs, by contrast, are forced to leave their usual place of residence—without crossing an international border—due to factors such as conflict, violence, persecution, or disasters (Arouna Sougane, 2014; African Development Bank, 2020).

Since 2018, attacks and violence in central Mali have driven the displacement of many people toward the south, particularly to Bamako (Souleymane Traoré & Aboubacar Doumbia, 2022). The capital thus serves as a place of refuge, a transit point, and a location for rebuilding livelihoods. In 2020, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) recorded in Bamako rose from approximately 1,886 in January to nearly 3,000 in October, according to an African Development Bank document (2020). More recent field data indicate that Bamako continues to receive displaced persons, even though the primary reception areas remain the regions directly affected by conflict (Brissiaud, 2020; Population Movement Commission, 2021). Internal migration is also a structural factor in the capital's growth. Data from the 2018–2024 General Census of Population and Housing show that Bamako received over 707,128 internal migrants, representing 38.7% of all internal migrants recorded in Mali (RGH, 2016; INSTAT, 2024). These figures demonstrate that Bamako's growth cannot be attributed solely to forced displacement; the influx of IDPs is part of a broader migratory dynamic driven by the capital's economic and social appeal.

The central question of this study is: to what extent does the arrival of internally displaced persons contribute to Bamako's rapid growth, and what are the resulting urban, social, and environmental consequences?

Indeed, this article aims to analyze the contribution of internal displacement to the demographic and spatial growth of Bamako.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Study area

An Bamako is located in southwestern Mali (Figure 1), in the Niger River valley. The city stretches between the river and the Koulouba, Mandingue, and Tienkoulou plateaus.

It is surrounded by the Koulikoro region and maintains close functional ties with the Kati and Koulikoro *cercles* (administrative districts). The Bamako District comprises several urban communes and serves as the country's main decision-making center. Its sphere of influence extends beyond the district's administrative boundaries to the peripheral communes of the Koulikoro region, particularly those located around Kati, Kalaban-Coro, Sangarébouougou, Moribabougou, Dialakorodji, Safo, and Mountougoula.

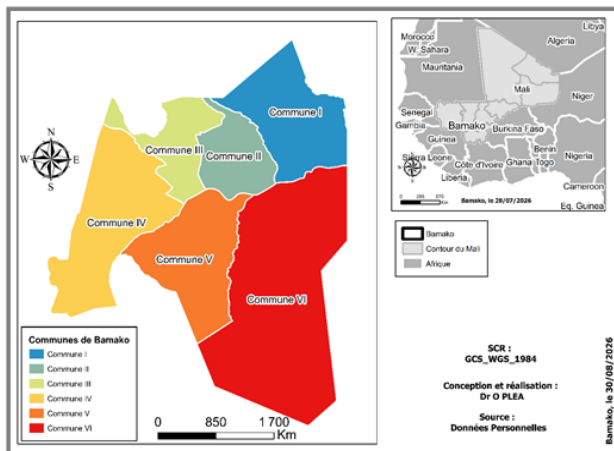


Figure 1 : Geographical overview of the study area: Bamako District.

B. Methods and data:

This research is a descriptive and analytical study based on a mixed-methods approach. It combines statistical analysis of field data, desk research, spatial analysis, and qualitative surveys. It aims to establish the link between: Bamako's demographic trends; the movements of internally displaced persons (IDPs); the expansion of peripheral neighborhoods; the pressure on urban facilities and services; and the economic and social integration strategies of displaced persons. Data were gathered through fieldwork and interviews with displaced households, host households, municipal officials, social service representatives, humanitarian organizations, youth and women's associations, neighborhood leaders, and informal sector actors. These findings were supplemented by data from the General Population and Housing Census and the Displacement Tracking Matrix.

III. RESULTS

Analysis of the results shows that Bamako's urban growth takes three main forms: the densification of central neighborhoods, the expansion of peripheral neighborhoods, and peri-urbanization in the municipalities surrounding the district.

Peripheral neighborhoods absorb a significant share of new arrivals due to relatively lower land costs and the opportunity to occupy vacant or minimally developed land. However, these areas are often characterized by a lack of adequate roads, drinking water, electricity, sanitation systems, schools, and health centers. The capital serves as the primary magnet for internal migrants in Mali, attracting people from all regions of the country—with the exception of certain areas where migration patterns are more complex. During observations conducted at displacement camps on the outskirts of Bamako—specifically in Yirimadjo and Zantiguila—households were interviewed about their reasons for moving from their home areas to Bamako. The results (Figure 2) indicate that the primary drivers for settling in Bamako include the search for employment, access to social services, children's schooling, the need for medical care, the presence of family networks, the search for protection, access to markets and commercial activities, and the opportunity to receive humanitarian aid.

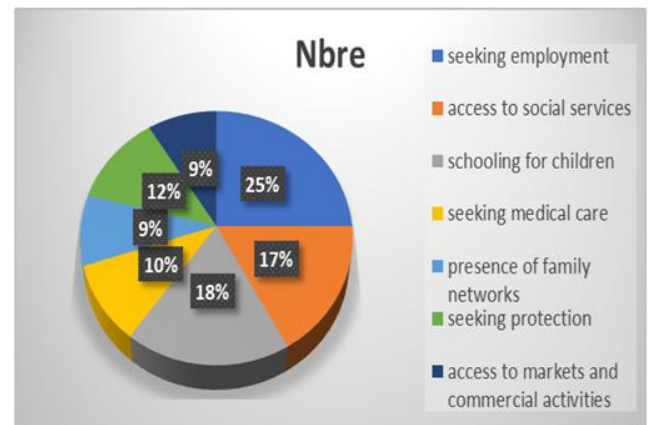


Figure 2: Motivations for displacement from the Center to Bamako

The IDPs settled in Bamako do not constitute a homogeneous group. They include rural households displaced by conflict, single women with children, the elderly, young people seeking employment, herders who have lost their livestock, farmers who have abandoned their land, traders who have left insecure areas, and individuals hosted by local families. Women and children make up a significant proportion of the IDP population. In 2019, women accounted for approximately 59% of the internally displaced persons recorded in Bamako, according to data cited in the African Development Bank report.

A. Bamako: The main hub for internal migration

Between 1998 and 2024, Bamako emerged as Mali's primary migration hub (Figure 3).

Research findings indicate that Bamako has long been the main destination for internal migrants in Mali. Analyses of internal migration show that the capital attracts more than half of all individuals living outside their household of origin. Bamako's prominence is driven by several factors: the concentration of administrative functions, the presence of major markets, the availability of formal and informal jobs, the concentration of educational institutions, relatively better access to healthcare, the presence of family networks, and access to humanitarian organizations. Thus, the influx of IDPs is part of a pre-existing urban dynamic, reinforcing growth already driven by economic migration and natural population increase.

Indicator	Value or trend	Interpretation
Metropolitan area population around 1998	Approximately 1 million inhabitants	Bamako is becoming the country's main urban hub
Population around 2009	Approximately 1.8 million inhabitants	Strong demographic and spatial growth
Average growth 1987–2009	4.9% per year	Rapid long-term urbanization
Average growth 1998–2009	6.1% per year	Accelerating urbanization
Share of internal migrants received in 2009	Approximately 61%	Bamako is Mali's primary migration hub
Share of inhabitants with a migration background in 2009	More than a third	Highly diverse population origins
Rapid growth 2025	Estimated population of 4.24 million inhabitants	Strong population growth

Source: INSTAT data (2025)

Figure 3: Trends in Bamako's population and attractiveness

B. Increase in the number of IDPs

Available data indicate a rise in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bamako between 2018 and 2025. A report on humanitarian aid for IDPs shows that their numbers grew from approximately 1,886 in January 2020 to nearly 3,000 by October of the same year. This increase is driven by the intensification of attacks in central Mali; the destruction or abandonment of villages; conflicts between armed groups and security forces; inter-communal clashes; threats against farmers, herders, and traders; and the search for protection and assistance.

However, displacement monitoring data show that Bamako hosts a smaller proportion of IDPs than the regions directly affected by conflict. In 2021, the Mopti, Gao, Timbuktu, Ségou, and Ménaka regions held the largest numbers of displaced persons, while Bamako was home to several thousand IDPs.

C. Concentration in peripheral areas

IDPs primarily settle in areas where housing is more affordable and where they can be hosted by relatives particularly around Commune VI (Figure 4). This trend drives the growth of urban peripheries. Peripheral areas generally offer lower rents, opportunities for informal housing, available land, relative proximity to markets, prospects for daily wage labor, and access to family or community support networks. However, these neighborhoods often lack adequate infrastructure. Consequently, the settlement of IDPs can increase population density in areas that are already vulnerable.

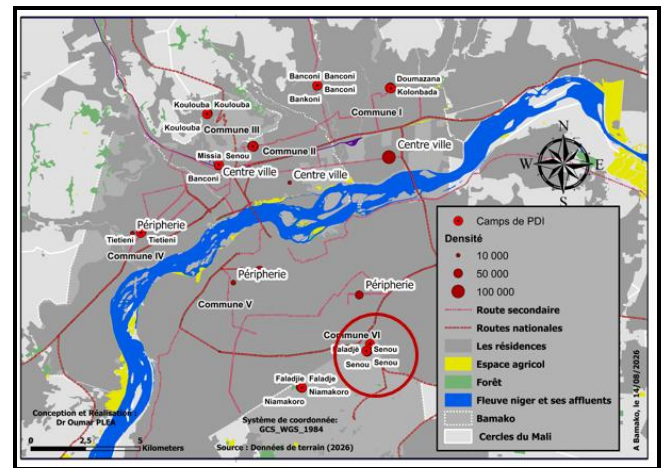


Figure 4: Concentration of IDPs in peripheral areas

D. Housing pressure:

The arrival of IDPs increases the demand for housing. Displaced households employ various strategies: staying with family, renting a room, sharing accommodation with other households, settling in makeshift shelters (see Figure 5 below), temporarily occupying undeveloped spaces, or staying in collective sites. This situation leads to housing overcrowding, rising rents in certain areas, and an increased need for construction materials. Host families bear a significant share of the burden, particularly when accommodating relatives who lack regular financial support.



Figure 5: Makeshift IDP housing in Yirimadjo

E. Pressure on water, sanitation, and social services

The concentration of displaced populations in certain neighborhoods increases the demand for: drinking water; latrines; waste collection; healthcare; schools; transport; food; and social services. In outlying neighborhoods, a lack of facilities can lead to: queues at water points; the use of unsafe water sources; a proliferation of illegal dumping sites; surface water contamination; an increase in waterborne diseases; children dropping out of school; and limited access to healthcare. This pressure does not affect only IDPs; host populations use the same facilities and may face increased competition for access to water, housing, jobs, and aid.

F. Contribution to the informal economy

Internally displaced persons are not merely recipients of humanitarian aid; they also participate in the urban economy through: small-scale trade; food sales; food service; handicrafts; domestic work; transport; construction activities; peri-urban market gardening; and waste recovery and recycling. Research on internal migration in Bamako shows that migrants contribute to the creation of informal economic activities and participate in the development of the city and its outskirts. IDPs can thus gradually transition from the status of aid recipients to that of economic actors.

G. Particular vulnerability of women and children

Women and children make up a significant proportion of the IDPs in Bamako. Displaced women may face the loss of a spouse or primary source of income; the responsibility of caring for multiple children; precarious housing; difficulty accessing employment; exposure to violence and exploitation; dependence on humanitarian aid; and a lack of administrative documents. Displaced children may encounter difficulties regarding schooling, nutrition, health, and protection.

Some are forced to engage in economic activities to contribute to household income. Population growth and the arrival of IDPs contribute to the expansion of the urban fabric into peripheral areas. This expansion results in the conversion of agricultural land, the reduction of natural spaces, the occupation of low-lying areas, an increase in unplanned construction, the degradation of drainage channels, heightened exposure to flooding, and greater distances between housing and services. Bamako's urban growth must therefore be analyzed as a demographic, spatial, and environmental phenomenon.

IV. DISCUSSION

IDPs: a driver of growth or a revealer of vulnerabilities?

Internally displaced persons contribute to Bamako's growth, but they are not the primary cause of the capital's urbanization. Their arrival acts instead as a localized accelerator and a revealer of existing urban vulnerabilities. Bamako's growth is primarily linked to a combination of factors: natural population increase, long-term internal migration, rural-to-urban migration, the concentration of jobs and services, urban sprawl, the arrival of IDPs, and peri-urbanization around Kati and neighboring communes. It would therefore be scientifically incorrect to attribute Bamako's rapid growth solely to internally displaced persons. However, their presence has had significant impacts on certain neighborhoods and services.

Spatially uneven growth

Growth driven by IDPs is not evenly distributed across the district. It is most visible in peripheral neighborhoods, peri-urban municipalities, along major roads, near markets and water points, in areas with active family networks, and around humanitarian reception sites. This distribution results in fragmented urban growth. Some areas possess relatively adequate facilities, while others are experiencing rapid urbanization devoid of planning or infrastructure.

Pressure on urban planning

Conventional urban planning often relies on population projections based on natural growth and standard migration patterns. Forced displacement is harder to predict, as it depends on the evolution of conflicts and humanitarian crises.

Authorities must therefore incorporate internal displacement into master development plans, local urban plans, housing programs, water supply strategies, sanitation plans, transport policies, and health and education programs.



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Factoring in IDPs must not lead to their marginalization in isolated camps; instead, it should facilitate their access to urban neighborhoods, services, and economic opportunities, while simultaneously supporting host communities.

Relations between IDPs and host populations

Host families play a pivotal role in accommodating displaced persons. They provide housing, food, social support, and information on economic opportunities. However, this hosting arrangement can strain host households' resources. Tensions may arise when housing is inadequate, jobs are scarce, aid is perceived as unequally distributed, public services are overwhelmed, land tenure arrangements are ill-defined, or host populations feel excluded from humanitarian programs. Aid projects must therefore systematically include host populations to prevent competition and strengthen social cohesion.

Temporary integration or long-term settlement?

Some internally displaced persons (IDPs) wish to return to their areas of origin once security conditions improve. Others remain in Bamako due to the destruction of their property, loss of livelihoods, children's schooling, or the establishment of new economic activities. IDP mobility can thus follow various trajectories: return to the place of origin; temporary settlement in Bamako; secondary displacement to another city; long-term settlement in the capital; or movement back and forth between Bamako and the village of origin. Public policies must avoid assuming that all IDPs will quickly return to their villages; they must plan for voluntary return, resettlement, and local integration alike.

Environmental Issues

Urban expansion driven by internal displacement can increase pressure on agricultural land, wetlands, and wooded areas. Unplanned construction can obstruct natural drainage paths and heighten flood risks.

Environmental impacts include the loss of green spaces, encroachment on flood-prone areas, soil erosion, increased waste generation, water pollution, the reduction of agricultural land, and the consumption of wood fuel. Consequently, the development of settlement areas must incorporate measures to protect low-lying areas, drainage corridors, water sources, green spaces, and peri-urban agricultural land.

To better manage Bamako's growth in the context of IDPs, it is necessary to: improve the registration and monitoring of displaced persons; generate data disaggregated by age, sex, origin, and settlement location; integrate IDPs into urban planning documents; strengthen water, sanitation, health, and education services; support host families; develop affordable housing programs; facilitate displaced persons' access to income-generating activities; support women and youth; protect agricultural zones and natural areas; foster coordination between the State, municipalities, and humanitarian organizations; plan for solutions regarding return, local integration, or resettlement; and involve IDPs in decisions that affect them.

V. CONCLUSION

Bamako's rapid growth stems from a combination of demographic, economic, migratory, and security-related factors. Internally displaced persons contribute to this growth, particularly in outlying neighborhoods and peri-urban municipalities. However, they are not the sole driver of the capital's urbanization. Their arrival is part of a long-standing dynamic involving the attraction of internal migrants, rural-to-urban migration, and the concentration of economic and administrative activities. IDPs have increased the strain on housing, water, sanitation, schools, health centers, and transport. They have also contributed to the development of the informal economy and the social vitality of Bamako. Their presence should not, therefore, be viewed solely as a humanitarian burden; it also represents a demographic and economic reality that must be integrated into urban policies. The response must be grounded in inclusive planning capable of addressing the needs of both displaced populations and host communities. Authorities need to improve data collection, strengthen services, manage urban expansion, and protect environmentally sensitive areas. Humanitarian organizations must support not only the IDPs but also the households hosting them. Ultimately, the issue of internal displacement in Bamako extends beyond the scope of emergency relief. It concerns the future of the metropolis, social cohesion, land management, environmental protection, and the capacity of institutions to manage rapid and unpredictable urbanization.



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