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**CROSS-REGIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEM
ON THE REINTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS
IN THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN**

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***RETURN MIGRATION TO MALI:
EXAMINING DEFINITIONS AND STATISTICAL SOURCES***

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Return Migration to Mali: Examining definitions and statistical sources

By Davide Calenda

The Cross-Regional Information System (CRIS) on the Reintegration of Migrants in their Countries of Origin is aimed at addressing the social economic legal and institutional factors and conditions shaping returnees' patterns of reintegration in their countries of origin. It sets out to explain why some return migrants succeed in reintegrating back home whereas others do not. CRIS is part and parcel of the Return migration and Development Platform (RDP) hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence. It is co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC, Berne) and the European University Institute.

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Return migration to Mali: Examining definitions and statistical sources

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Introduction

The definitions of return migration adopted by national censuses and large-scale surveys reflect domestic policy perceptions and priorities as applied to return and return migrants. The first part of this study explores the ways in which the definitions adopted by national statistical agencies in West Africa and, more specifically in Mali, have varied over time with various types of migration flows in specific periods of time, the priority given to nation-building dynamics¹, and with the influence of external drivers. Insufficient institutional capacity and poor knowledge infrastructures may also account for this situation. A combination of these factors comes into play in West Africa. As pointed out by several scholars, the scant availability and reliability of sources heavily affects the quality of migration data and studies (Ba and Ndione 2006; Konseiga 2005).

The second part sets out to investigate the sources of official data on return migration in Mali and discusses the availability and reliability of such data. A section is devoted to so-called “enforced return”, i.e., the removal of unauthorized migrants, which has been subject to major policy attention in bilateral and multilateral talks involving Mali while shaping at the same time policy priorities and perceptions.

¹ Benedict Anderson has well explained the importance of national building dynamics in influencing the way social groups and individuals are classified and counted (Anderson 1994).

1. Definitions

Ba and Ndione (2006) have identified different definitions adopted by the West African statistical agencies in their censuses. Until the 80s, the term ‘migration’ was often used to refer to different phenomena, i.e., internal or international emigration, immigration, and return migration.

In the censuses carried out in Mali in 1976 and 1987, the place of the previous residence and the length of residence at the moment of the census were not asked. Consequently, we cannot distinguish between international or internal migrants, visitors or returnees.

A similar drawback is found in the definition of return migration adopted in the framework of a large-scale survey carried out between 1992 and 1993. The *Enquête Malienne sur les Migrations et l’Urbanisation* (EMMU) recorded all residential changes of more than six months regarding individuals aged above 15 by using a retrospective collection of migratory biographies². According to the EMMU definition, return migrants are individuals who experienced a migration and are present in their birthplace at the time of the survey (CERPOD 1996, 44). EMMU distinguishes two categories of return migrants (CERPOD 1996, 98): those who returned to Mali over the last ten years and those who returned for more than ten years. As pointed out by Konseiga, in the EMMU survey, “each individual may have migrated several times during the study period, regardless of his/her nationality. The main focus is the source and destination country or area” (Konseiga 2005, 4). This definition allows a partial estimation of return migration. The lack of attention to nationality might be explained by the fact that the main aim of this survey was to explore the phenomenon of urbanization and interregional mobility. At that time, West Africa was considered one of the most important regions of temporary and circular labour migrations with high percentages of movements from rural to rural and rural to urban areas (Cordell et al. 1996). It is worth observing that high mobility was facilitated by a gradual integration process among West African countries (the Economic Community of the West Africa ratified by Mali in 1979).

‘Migration’ was used by the Malian authorities as a catch-all concept until the late 80s

As of the late 80s, the definitions used by West African countries to measure return migration, were gradually adapted to the recommendations of the United Nations. The reference to the ‘length of residence’ and the ‘birthplace’ was introduced in order to provide more specific and desegregated information about migrants (Ba and Ndione 2006, 12). The last two Malian censuses made in 1998 and in 2008-2009 are reflective of this change. The above censuses define return migrants as persons who lived elsewhere for more than six months. A distinction is made between national and international

² The biographies include the previous five years.

migrants³. The main objective of the censuses was to ‘count’ the population. The data collected do not allow pre- and post-return conditions to be better understood.

By the second half of the 2000s, the abrupt interruption of the migration cycle of many Malians became a relevant phenomenon in Mali. In this respect, the massive repatriation of Malian nationals from Côte d’Ivoire in the period 2003-2004 due to the war represented a crucial event (Ouattara 2010, 13). Starting from this event, repatriated, expelled, and migrants brought back home through deportation schema such

‘Assisted Voluntary Return’ gradually influenced the political agenda

as the so called Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR), gradually influenced the political agenda as well as the cognitive frame of Malian institutions concerning return migration. It must be remarked, indeed, that expelled and repatriated migrants cannot be properly considered as return migrants. Expelled and repatriated

have not decided to return and the patterns of reintegration in their country of origin are different from those of return migrants. Expelled and repatriated started to be registered by Malian authorities and became the target of actions of national and international organizations. By contrast, migrants who legally resided abroad and decided to return, or temporary labour migrants who, as a result of the termination of their job contract, return to their country of origin, on a temporary or permanent basis, etc., have remained almost invisible in the institutional framework.

As for data, an important development in the conceptualization of return migration is represented by a recent survey - *Enquête Emploi Permanente Auprès des Ménages* (EPAM) dated 2011/2012. It includes a section specifically dedicated to the returnees. The survey was carried out by the Employment National Agency (ANPE) in collaboration with the Malian National Institute for Statistics (INSTAT). The definition used by EPAM substantially draws on the one recommended by the United Nations (UN) and used by the MIREM project⁴. Actually, the survey addresses individuals who are active in the labour market (aged over 15) and collects information about nationality, countries of immigration and duration of migration experience.⁵ Furthermore, the survey investigates some pre- and post-return conditions and distinguishes migrants who decided to return from migrants who had to return owing to adverse circumstances. The coherence with the CRIS methodology is strong. Actually, the questions used by EPAM are almost identical to some of the questions used in MIREM questionnaire elaborated by the Return migration and Development Platform since 2005⁶.

³ The 1998 questionnaire can be downloaded from the “Central Microdata Catalog” of the World Bank. Accessed February 15, 2012, <http://microdata.worldbank.org>. Reference: Mali - General Census of Population and Housing.

⁴ <http://rsc.eui.eu/RDP/research-projects/mirem/>

⁵ The section contains 17 questions.

⁶ Our definition of return migration partially draws on the one recommended by the United Nations (1998). It refers specifically to migrants who returned to their country of origin in the course of the last ten years, for this time limit allows the impact of the experience of migration on the interviewee’s pattern of reintegration to be assessed. It also allows the respondents to recount their migratory experiences more precisely. Returnees are persons (men and women, both adults and minor above 15 years) who lived for at least one year abroad before

2. Available statistics

2.1 Census data

Given the different definitions of return migration used in the censuses and large-scale surveys in Mali, the data reported in this section must be interpreted with caution.

As mentioned before, the first large scale survey that collected data on return migrants to Mali is the *Enquête Malienne sur les Migrations et l'Urbanisation* (EMMU) dated 1992-1993⁷. It was first published in 1996 (CERPOD 1996) as part of a broader census carried out in West African countries and promoted by the *Réseau d'Enquête sur les Migrations et l'Urbanisation en Afrique de l'Ouest - REMUAO*⁸.

From 1988 to 1992, more than 6.4 million migratory movements were recorded among the seven countries of the network (Bocquier and Traoré 2000), out of which 2.3 million were international migratory movements. In Mali, the stock of returnees in 1992 was 853,193, but disaggregated data by nationality are not reported in the CERPOD report (CERPOD 1996)⁹. Unfortunately, the database and *ad hoc* analyses are not available. Only descriptive tables can be found in the CERPOD report (CERPOD 1996)¹⁰. Given this limit, data do not analyse how pre- and post-return factors may or may not influence patterns of reintegration.

The last two censuses carried out by the Malian National Statistical Institute (INSTAT) - *Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat du Mali* (RGPH) - in 1998 and 2009 included some data on return migration. However, data have not been elaborated and fully disseminated yet by INSTAT.

On the basis of the abovementioned 1998 RGPH, 41,824 migrants returned to Mali from 1993 to 1997 (see also CARIM¹¹; Lombard and Ndione 2004), while the stock of returnees in 1998 was up to 287,497 (about 3 per cent of population), 95 per cent of them came from African countries (Chauvet and Mercier 2011). As far as we could understand, this number refers to Malian nationals who returned from abroad. This may explain why the figures are much lower than those reported by CERPOD in 1993 (CERPOD 1996), which included also internal migrants.

returning to their country of origin and who, at the time of the interview, have returned for more than three months (Source: <http://rsc.eui.eu/RDP>). Previous researches have shown the empirical efficacy of this definition. See the project MIREM (*MIgration de REtour au Maghreb*): <http://rsc.eui.eu/RDP/research-projects/mirem/>

⁷ The network was created in 1989 and the survey was carried out in seven countries in 1993: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal.

⁸ This survey was coordinated by CERPOD (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche sur la Population et pour le Développement) together with IRD (Institut français de recherche scientifique pour le développement en coopération), CEPED (Centre français d'Etudes sur la Population et le Développement), and the Department of demography at the University of Montréal.

⁹ De Vreyer et al. report 33,000 individuals aged over 15 returned from Europe to the REMUAO countries from 1988 to 1992 (De Vreyer et al. 2010, 2; see also Konseiga 2005, 6).

¹⁰ <http://rsc.eui.eu/RDP/research/analyses/statistics/>

¹¹ CARIM, "Annexe. Profil des migrations du pays." Accessed February 27, 2012, <http://www.carim.org/>. Lombard and Ndione (2004) report 42,000 return migrants.

In the 1998 RGPH census, a return migrant is defined as a person who lived “elsewhere” (i.e., in another place in Mali or abroad) for more than six months. The questionnaire used the following questions: “Did X reside elsewhere for more than six months?” and “Where was X residing immediately before coming where he is currently?”¹². Drawing on this indicator, Chauvet and Mercier “flag return migrants knowing (more or less precisely) where they had migrated” (Chauvet and Mercier 2011, 11). These data must be interpreted with caution because, as stated by the authors, we do not know “whether the data on return migration, available in the 1998 census, are precisely measuring return migration.” Moreover, as the authors pointed out, there is no “disaggregated measure of migration” (Chauvet and Mercier 2011, 12).

As mentioned in the first section, the only reliable data on return migration are provided by the *Enquête Emploi Permanente Auprès des Ménages* (EPAM) dated 2011/2012. The sample of the survey includes approximately 3,000 households¹³. The Malians who, at the moment of the survey were in the household and declared to have made at least one international migration experience, numbered 670 out of which 298 were forced to return owing to adverse circumstances.

2.2 *The enforced-return statistical bias*

During the previous decade, return migration became a relevant social phenomenon in Mali and has gradually influenced the political agenda. In this respect, the massive repatriation of Malian nationals from Côte d'Ivoire in 2003-2004 contributed to raise the attention of Malian institutions on return migration (Ouattara 2010, 13). At the same time this event conveyed a limited understanding as applied to return. Actually, return has been limitedly viewed as resulting from the abrupt interruption of the migration cycle. So far, a great deal of policy attention has been devoted to expelled migrants, or to those repatriated to Mali through AVR programmes, as reflected by official statistics. At the same time, this predominant policy concern has hindered the exploration of the factors shaping reintegration, for return has been addressed by policy-makers as the end of the migration cycle.

This statistical bias is also perceptible in the OECD International Migration Database and Eurostat data. Table 1 refers to Malian nationals who were expelled and who have *de facto* left the territory of the Member State, following a removal order.

¹² The 1998 questionnaire can be downloaded from the “Central Microdata Catalog” of the World Bank. Accessed February 15, 2012, <http://microdata.worldbank.org>. Reference: Mali - General Census of Population and Housing.

¹³ I am grateful to Aoua Saran Dembele, who is in charge of the EPAM survey, for having provided useful information and data during my stay in Bamako in February 2012. Aoua Saran Dembele explained that a number of households that could not be interviewed due to several difficulties such as the inaccessibility of several flooded areas in the delta of Niger, isolated areas in the Kayes region, insecurity in the town of Nampala, and in the Segou region.

Table 1 Malian nationals expelled from each EU-27 Member State, 2008-2010

	2008	2009	2010
Austria	0	0	0
Belgium	0	5	5
Bulgaria	0	0	0
Cyprus	0	0	5
Czech Republic	0	0	0
Denmark	0	0	0
Estonia	0	0	0
Finland	0	0	0
France	480	260	250
Germany	10	10	10
Greece	0	0	0
Hungary	0	0	0
Ireland	0	0	0
Italy	5	0	5
Latvia	0	0	0
Lithuania	0	0	0
Luxembourg	-	0	0
Malta	10	10	5
Netherlands	10	10	20
Poland	0	0	0
Portugal	0	0	0
Romania	0	0	0
Slovakia	0	0	0
Slovenia	0	0	0
Spain	1,220	445	85
Sweden	0	5	0
United Kingdom	10	20	25
Total	1,745	765	410

Source: Eurostat Data elaborated by RDP, 2011.¹⁴

Note: - no data available.

However, such data do not inform about the actual country of return which may be the country of origin or the last country of transit, or even another third country. This explains why the Eurostat data are not

¹⁴ Table 1 refers to “third country nationals who have in fact left the territory of the Member State, following an administrative or judicial decision or act stating that their stay is illegal and imposing an obligation to leave the territory (see Art. 7.1b of the Council Regulation n. 862/2007). On a voluntary basis Member States provide Eurostat with a subcategory which relates to third country nationals returned to a third country only. Persons who left the territory within the year may have been subject to an obligation to leave in a previous year. As such, the number of persons who actually left the territory may be greater than those who were subject to an obligation to leave in the same year. These statistics include forced returns and assisted voluntary returns. Unassisted voluntary returns are included where these are reliably recorded. Data do not include persons who are transferred from one Member State to another under the mechanism established by the Dublin Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 and (EC) No 1560/2003, for these cases see related Dublin Statistics). Each person is counted only once within the reference period” (Eurostat Metadata of the indicator “Third country nationals returned following an order to leave.” Accessed February 02, 2012, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/migr_eil_esms.htm).

fully consistent with those provided by the Malian border control authorities (see below Table 4). Moreover, registration procedures concerning the persons subjected to deportation vary from country to country.

Other figures are provided by the *Délégation Générale des Maliens de l'Extérieur* [General Delegation of Malians Abroad] – (DGME) - that registered Malian nationals who were expelled from 2002 to 2011.

Table 2 Malian nationals expelled from African countries: 2002-2011

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*	Total	%
Algeria	0	0	410	276	0	0	0	559	351	1,346	2,942	4.2
Angola	0	22	501	78	0	19	12	28	2	19	681	0.9
Côte d'Ivoire	0	22,676	17,561	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,783	42,020	60.2
Equatorial Guinea	0	0	152	0	0	7	0	0	14	0	173	0.2
Gabon	0	4	4	0	0	0	73	2	20	9	112	0.16
Kenya	0	0	2	2	0	2	3	2	1	5	17	0.0
Libya	67	29	308	689	49	864	664	228	192	12,171	15,261	21.8
Mauritania	0	0	11	0	76	0	2	0	0	0	89	0.1
Morocco	0	0	6	1,289	8	152	0	9	4	9	1,477	2.1
Mozambique	0	0	0	0	0	3	127	18	0	1	149	0.2
Rep. of Congo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	20	31	0.0
South Africa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0.00
Tunisia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	6,831	6,835	9.7
Zambia	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.0
Total	67	22,732	18,956	2,335	133	1,047	881	848	598	22,195	69,792	100

* Until 31st October 2011.

Source: Délégation Générale des Maliens de l'Extérieur/Bureaux d'Accueil, d'Information et d'Orientation des Maliens de l'Extérieur, elaborated by RDP, 2011.¹⁵

These data should be treated with caution as they might include expelled persons who are not Malian by origin or nationality. Moreover, such data do not include a large number of Malians who were not registered by the border control authorities. According to the DGME source, from 2002 to 31st October 2011, 76,527 Malians were expelled, including 91 per cent from other African countries. More precisely, the number of Malians expelled from African countries went from 67 in 2002 to 22,195 in 2011. The recent turmoil in Libya partly accounts for the dramatic increase in the number of expelled persons in 2011 (around 50 per cent). Such data also show that a large number of Malian nationals have been predominantly deported from Côte d'Ivoire¹⁶. This stems from the long domestic political crisis that the

¹⁵ These data come mainly from periodical reports provided by the *Bureaux d'Accueil, d'Information et d'Orientation des Maliens de l'Extérieur* [Home Office, Information and Orientation of Malians Abroad] located at international airports and railway stations in Bamako and Kayes, and from the Direction de la Protection Civile [Department of Civil Defense]. Data are then processed by the Bureau des Statistiques de la Délégation Générale des Maliens de l'Extérieur (DGME) [Statistical Office of the General Delegation of Malians Abroad]. The Department of Civil Defence in Mali registers and provides assistance to expelled Malian nationals. These data should be treated with caution as they might include expelled persons who have not Malian origin or nationality.

¹⁶ The Malian consulate in Abidjan reported that 51,000 Malians repatriated during the Ivorian crisis between 2003 and 2004 (quoted in Outtara 2010, 13).

country experienced until mid-2011. Table 3 pertains to the number of Malians who took part in the voluntary repatriation programmes from Côte d'Ivoire organized by the Malian authorities in 2003.

Table 3 Malian returnees from Côte d'Ivoire, as part of the voluntary repatriation operation in 2003

Bamako	Kayes	Kkoro	Sikasso	Segou	Mopti	Gao	Tombouctou	Total
30,778	2,180	8,984	18,978	3,492	5,572	2,200	1,428	73,612

Source: Délégation Générale des Maliens de l'Extérieur/Bureaux d'Accueil, d'Information et d'Orientation des Maliens de l'Extérieur in Camara et al. 2011, 92-99, elaborated by RDP, 2011.

It is important to stress that the number of Malians back to Mali from Côte d'Ivoire in this period was much larger than that the one provided by the authorities. The number of Malian nationals in Côte d'Ivoire at the beginning of the hostilities was up to approximately 2 million (Ministry for Malians Abroad and African Integration, 2005, see Ouattara 2010, 13) and the number of Malians evacuated from Côte d'Ivoire to Mali was estimated at 200,000 (Camara et al. 2011, 22).

As far as Malian nationals expelled from European countries, they numbered 218 in 2002 and 142 in 2011 with a peak in 2008 when 1,834 Malians were deported mainly from France and Spain. Overall, 5,765 Malians were expelled from Europe between 2002 and 2011.

Table 4 Malian nationals expelled from European countries: 2002-2011

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*	Total	%
France	218	288	364	369	272	253	410	89	82	51	2,396	41.5
Germany	0	2	0	1	0	3	1	0	2	0	9	0.1
Italy	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	4	0.0
Malta	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0.0
Spain	0	4	1	0	623	534	1410	575	88	90	3,325	57.6
Switzerland	0	0	0	3	7	3	7	0	1	0	21	0.3
United Kingdom	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	5	1	8	0.1
Total	218	294	366	373	902	794	1,834	664	178	142	5,765	100

* Until 31st October 2011

Source: Délégation Générale des Maliens de l'Extérieur/Bureaux d'Accueil, d'Information et d'Orientation des Maliens de l'Extérieur, elaborated by RDP, 2011.

Table 5 Malian nationals expelled from American and Asian countries: 2002-2011

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*	Total
America											
Canada	0	1	0	1	0	2	3	1	3	1	12
United States	2	6	0	4	0	10	6	6	6	2	42
Asia											
Israel	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	4	6	4	35
Saudi Arabia	79	82	139	23	0	74	16	51	113	304	881
Total	81	89	139	28	0	86	46	62	128	311	970

* Until 31st October 2011

Source: Délégation Générale des Maliens de l'Extérieur/Bureaux d'Accueil, d'Information et d'Orientation des Maliens de l'Extérieur, elaborated by RDP, 2011.

Some general remarks can be drawn from the data mentioned above.

Firstly, data on removals respond to bureaucratic and security logics and do not inform at all about reintegration. To date, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been the only international body that has studied this category of ‘returnees’ (Ouatara, 2010). Ouattara analyses the socioeconomic conditions of Malian migrants who were repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire between 2003 and 2004. The author looked at Malian associations comprising migrants who were repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire. His analysis is based on around 6,000 migrants who decided to remain in Mali (Ouattara 2010, 14).

The result of this study confirms what has already been highlighted by other researches in this field: interruption of the migration cycle negatively impacts on migrants’ reintegration (Cassarino 2008). Those who do not have sufficient or adequate resources are faced with strong difficulties back home. Such resources include family relationships and, more importantly, social capital. Ouattara shows that many migrants, after return, were trapped in the informal labour market and many failed to transfer the skills they acquired abroad.

The interruption of the migration cycle negatively impacts on migrants’ reintegration

Secondly, the readmission agreement concluded in 2007 between Mali and Spain may account for the increase in the number of deported Malians nationals from this European country in 2008. Finally, data on expelled Malian nationals from other African countries reflect the strong vulnerability of Malian migrants to regime instability in the region. We have already seen that most migration flows in Mali, including return migration, take place among African countries and between neighbouring countries

Data on expelled Malian nationals from African countries reflect the strong vulnerability of Malian migrants to regime instability in the region

especially. Geographical proximity, cultural similarities, and institutional factors such as the gradual consolidation of a regional economic area among West African countries, have facilitated human mobility over the last decades. This suddenly changed as a result of the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire. The massive repatriation of Malian nationals from this sub-Saharan country exposed them to political and social vulnerability. The ordeal

suffered by migrants contributed to increasing their visibility into the public sphere. In a similar vein, the numerous migrants who escaped from the Libyan crisis in 2011 and from Côte d’Ivoire illustrate how ‘uncertainty’ constitutes a key aspect of Malian migration. Further research should be carried out to understand the consequences of this specific situation.

3. Conclusions

There is no question that providing a clear picture of return migration to Mali remains extremely difficult given the paucity of available statistical data and sources. This difficulty partially stems from structural factors (knowledge infrastructures, financial resources, institutional capacity)¹⁷. At the same time, a more accurate

Malian institutions have been subjected to a form of enforced-return bias, at both political and statistical levels

analysis lends support to the idea that Malian institutions have been subjected to a form of enforced-return bias, at both political and statistical levels. Such a bias has shaped policy perceptions as applied to return viewed by officials and public institution as the end of the migration cycle.

The analysis of the definitions used for migration and return migration is necessary to understand how the approach on return migration, from a statistical point of view, has slightly changed over time. Some hypotheses on why these changes took place have been made.

Returnees are viewed as migrants whose migration cycle simply failed

Until the 80s, the term 'migration' was used as a buzzword encompassing different aspects of migration. Building a typology of migrants was hence difficult (Chauvet and Mercier 2011; Ratha and

Shaw 2007; Shaw 2007; Ba and Ndione 2006). Policies prioritized circular, temporary, internal, and macro-regional migrations (West African regions especially), which, until then, characterized most migration flows in Mali. This priority results from the process of regional integration among West African countries.

As of the late 80s, the definitions used by West African countries to measure return migration was gradually adapted to the United Nations recommendations. This adaptation, which may be responsive to the need for comparable data, was conducive to more accurate measuring methods of return migrants. However, a form of bureaucratic bias, which eventually resulted from nation-building, has permeated the ways in which data have been collected in Mali. Priority has been given to national censuses. In other words, having a macro vision of migration movements was a common objective. However, collecting data allowing migration and return migration to be further investigated, from a statistical point of view, was not. Unsurprisingly, there is no systematic literature on return migration in Mali. Unfortunately,

¹⁷ The National statistical institute in Mali (INSTAT) is a relatively new structure resulting from an institutional reform started at the beginning of the 90s (see: “http://instat.gov.ml/contenu_page.aspx?pa=58.” Accessed February 20, 2012). The fourth census originally planned in April 2008 and then postponed to April 2009 is the last one (previous census were made in 1976 and 1987).

In 2011, for the first time in Mali, a large-scale survey was carried out including a specific section on return migration

even the large-scale surveys made in Mali over the last years on labour market trends, do not take into account the case study of return migrants.

By the mid-2000s, return migration started to be more important in Mali, although its policy relevance was still in its infancy. In 2011, for the first time in Mali, a large-scale survey - *Enquête Emploi Permanente Auprès des Ménages*

(EPAM) – was carried out including a specific section on return migration. Moreover, the method allowed different types of return migrants to be distinguished with reference to space and time, and with reference to return motivations. This aspect constitutes a novelty in its own right. Actually, as argued before, the massive repatriation of migrants from African countries and the high number of Malian expelled over the last ten years have conveyed a narrow and negative image of returnees: returnees are viewed as migrants whose migration cycle simply failed.

Admittedly, the abrupt interruption of the migration cycle often leads to unstable and precarious patterns of reintegration. How do such patterns differ from each other and according to which variables? How do mechanisms aimed at supporting reintegration actually work? To date, neither official statistics nor small-scale research surveys on return migration to Mali have provided sufficient responses.

The political and institutional implications of these considerations are quite evident. Among others, they have a double-edged effect. First, policies and measures have been adopted so far by Malian state agencies (in cooperation with foreign governmental and intergovernmental organizations) without having sufficient knowledge about the reality of return migration. Second, the lack of any accurate statistical data hinders the assessment of the policy measures adopted to “assist” Malian returnees to their country of origin.

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