

# **FACT FILE**

## **The life of Street Children in Mali**

Mali is one of the least developed countries in the world. It is one of the frequently drought-stricken Sahel countries and the unfavourable climate, together with its land-locked situation have hindered its economic development.

There are about six and a half million children living in the country with 38.3% of the entire population being aged 14 years or younger and most live in poverty. Due to the widespread poverty in the country, 700,000 children under the age of 15 years are economically active. These children have very limited life opportunities, do not attend school, have no access to health care and are never likely to enter the official job market. They are also at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking and it's a simple fact that if a child is taken from the streets and trafficked no-one apart from their fellow street kids would ever know or even care.

The children of Mali are in great need. Their days are often spent begging for food, or walking for miles to get water. Girls on the streets are particularly at risk of abuse, especially in the capital Bamako where the situation for many children is very bad. The rapidly growing population are very poor and settle down on the edges of the town where some sort of "shanty towns" are created.

In order for these people to survive, their children are forced onto the streets to beg or to work in order to prevent the whole family from starving. The number of these street children is rising constantly.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is still widespread in Mali, and is normally undertaken before girls are six years old. The legal age for marriage in Mali is 18 for girls and 21 for boys, although girls can marry under the age of 15 with parental or court consent. A number of these young who marry when under the age of 15, die due to engaging in sexual activity that their bodies aren't mature enough to cope with.

There are social institutions (orphanages) trying to help the street children and in some cases poor parents, to recover their dignity. Some of these institutions are managed by the State, many others are private ones and they build partnership locally and out of the country for the causes of the children.

A promoter of an orphanage gave ADRA-Mali the following testimonies.

*"I met a street child by the name of Fatima who was eleven years old. She had been on the street since she was 9 years old and soon after coming onto the street, she was raped by unknown individual then introduced to prostitution. I took her home to provide her habitat and acceptable security conditions. She is 17 years old now and I make all efforts to occupy her in the orphanage's duties, to prevent her from going back on the street. For a while I managed well, but lately, she sometimes disappears for 5 days, then one day, she reappears. To better keep an eye on her, I asked her to care for a baby a task that requires her to give permanent supervision. Now she is really serious with what she is doing. I'm trying to find for her the opportunity to learn sewing or hairdressing that would be more useful for her in her future life."*

*"I also met a 15 years old girl Alima who was chased out by her parents because she had a child. She had found refuge in the street where she continued to live in prostitution with a child in her arms. I brought her in my orphanage with her child. I first hired her as domestic help in the orphanage and I was paying her double the monthly salary that others normally perceive when they are employed in private homes. As she was serious in what I gave her to do, I found her a job in a hairdressing salon where she still works. She became independent, and she takes good care of her child. Ultimately, she rejoined her family and her financial contribution is much appreciated by her parents. This is to conclude that if we give heart to our ideas, we can help those street children and orphans to recover and have dignity and becoming very useful to society. That's the goal we strive for everyday in our work".*

