

Mali

Country Overview

Politics

Mali is a landlocked, semi-presidential republic in West Africa. In 2023 the country was governed by a transitional presidency under Assimi Goïta, who assumed this role in June 2021.¹ Goïta, with the Malian military, conducted a coup to remove the previous president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, in May 2021. The transitional government was originally chartered to operate for 18 months before a general election must occur.² In March 2022, Mali extended their transition timetable to 24 months.³ In March 2023, a constitution referendum was delayed to February 2024, maintaining the military-run transitional government.⁴

Since a military coup in 2012, Mali has experienced persistent political turmoil and instability.⁵ Additionally, armed groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) have occupied much of Mali's northern region.⁶

Economy

Mali is classified by the World Bank as a low-income economy.⁷ Mali has a relatively undiversified economy, leaving it vulnerable to commodity price fluctuations in gold and agricultural exports such as cotton—the country's main sources of revenue.⁸ In addition, other economic vulnerabilities include access to electricity and infrastructure, which limit production capacity.⁹ Mali's GDP growth rate declined from 7.1 percent in 2014 to -1.2 percent in 2020, and recovered to 3.7 percent in 2022.¹⁰

It is estimated that 80 percent of the labor force is engaged in agricultural activities.¹¹ The other 20 percent of the labor force is engaged in industry and services.¹² The unemployment rate in 2022 was estimated at 2.8 percent.¹³

Since the 2021 coup, Mali has faced trade sanctions from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Placed in January 2022, the sanctions also included border closures between Mali and neighboring ECOWAS member countries, some of which are Mali's largest trade partners.¹⁴

Social/Human Development

Mali is considered one of the most impoverished countries in the world. Poverty rates vary regionally, but around 45 percent of the total population lives below the poverty line.¹⁵ With a population that is expected to double by 2035, access to resources and delivery of services over the country's vast territory remains a development challenge.¹⁶



Mali is ethnically diverse. The largest ethnic group is the Bambara (33.3 percent), followed by the Fulani (13.3 percent), Sarakole (9.8 percent), Senufo/Maniaka (9.6 percent), and the Malinke (8.8 percent). Other minority ethnic groups include the Dogon (8.7 percent), the Sonrai (5.9 percent), and the Bobo (2.1 percent).¹⁷ The U.S. Department of State reported that men and boys of Songhai ethnicity were subject to the practice of debt bondage in the salt mines of Taoudeni, located in the north of Mali.¹⁸ It was also reported that Black Tuareg's were subject to forced labor in the eastern and northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal.¹⁹ Black Tuaregs are often referred to as "Bellah" and there were reports of kidnapping "Bellah" children in a tradition of hereditary slavery.²⁰

U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary (2023)

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2

According to the *Trafficking in Persons Report*, trafficking risk may be found among Malian women and children in export supply chains including agriculture (particularly cotton) and artisanal gold mining. Men and boys, predominantly of Songhai ethnicity, are vulnerable to trafficking in the salt mining sector. Additionally, there are an estimated 300,000 victims in hereditary slavery in Mali, a customary practice among Mali's Tuareg community.

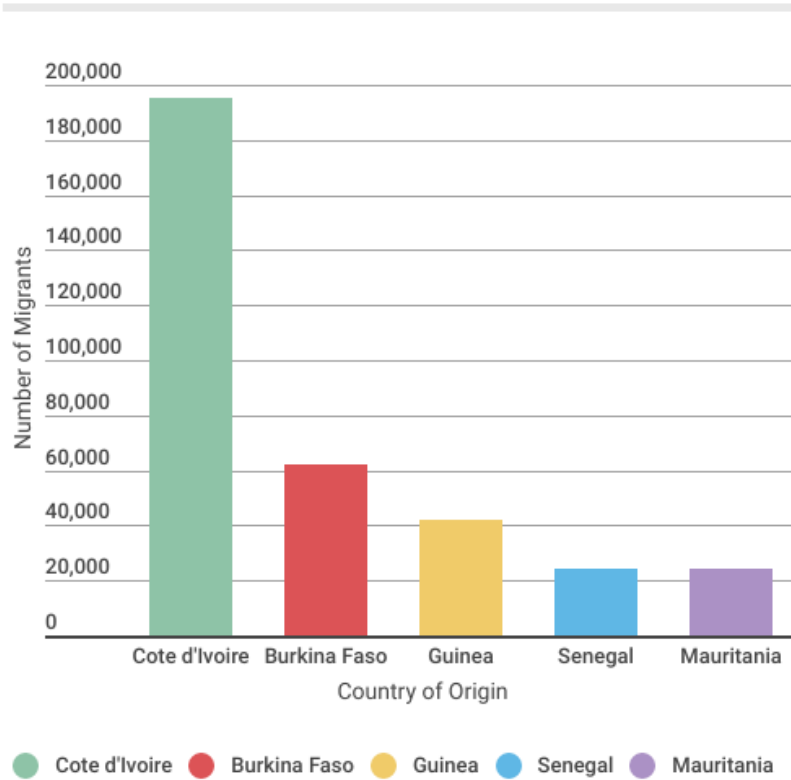
Read the full TIP Report at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/mali/>

Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Mali has negative net migration.²¹ According to 2020 data, migrants destined for Mali mostly came from Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Guinea. In addition, large populations of migrants came from Senegal, Mauritania, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo.²²



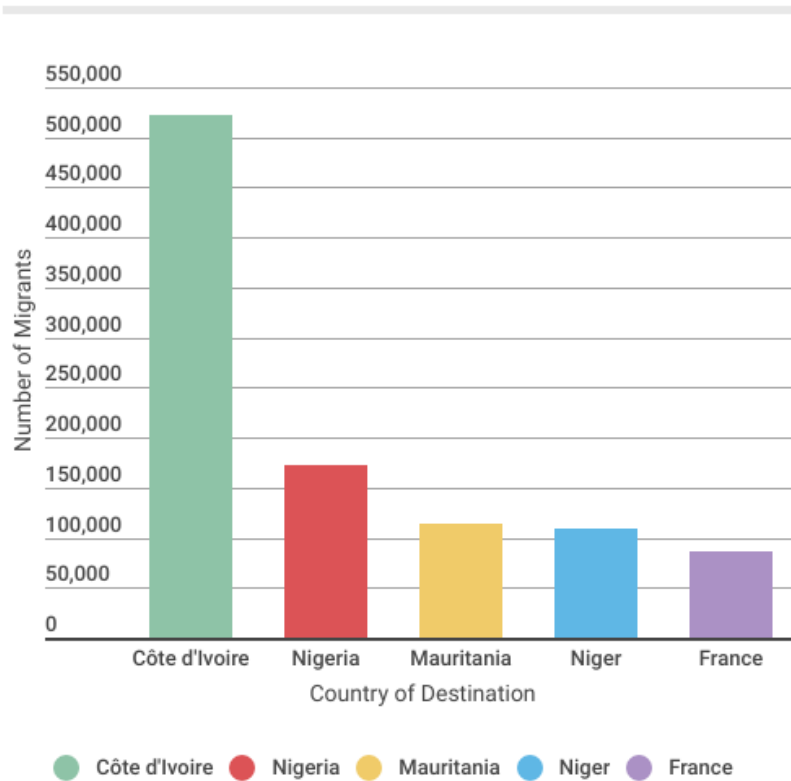
Top Migrant Sending Countries to Mali



Ongoing civil conflict has spurred mass migration out of Mali, primarily of civilians in the northern and central regions.²³ The top destination country for migrants from Mali is, by far, Côte d'Ivoire, followed by Nigeria, Mauritania, Niger, and France.²⁴



Top Destination Countries for Malian Migrants



According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were an estimated 377,519 persons of concern in Mali in 2022 of whom an estimated 52,680 people were refugees and 816 people were asylum seekers.²⁵ There were an estimated 380,000 internally displaced persons in the country at the end of 2022.²⁶ Rates of displacement have steadily increased in Mali due to increased violence in the northern and central regions.²⁷ There were 13,539 registered refugees in Mali of Afro-Mauritanian descent who had been expelled from Mauritania in 1989.²⁸

In addition to migrants and emigrants, some cultural practices promote migration as a rite of passage for young men and include circular and seasonal migration, such as pastoral and nomadic movements.

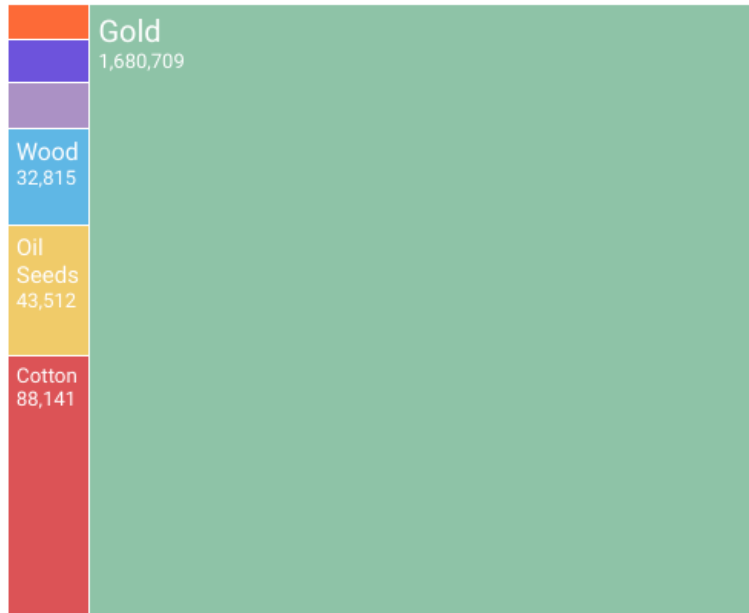
Exports and Trade

Mali's top exports in 2022 include precious metals such as gold, cotton, oil seeds, wood, and iron ore.²⁹ Other top exports include dates, fertilizers, and fruits/nuts.



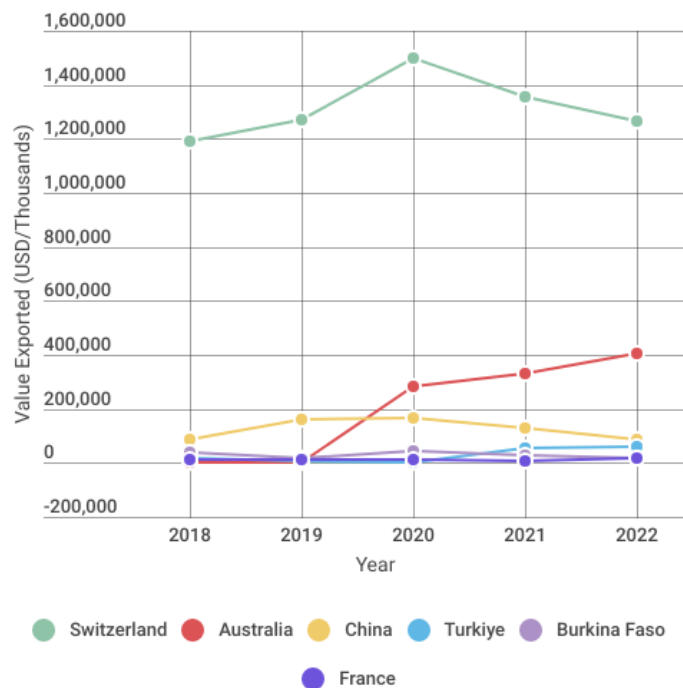
Top Commodity Exports in Mali (USD/Thousands)

2022



The top importer of all goods from Mali is Switzerland, followed by Australia, China, Türkiye, and Burkina Faso.³⁰

Mali Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Policy/Legal Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

The constitution permits workers the right to form unions and to strike, however, this right does not include workers in essential services. If essential workers were to strike, the minister of labor may force compulsory arbitration depending on the case.³¹ Essential workers are predetermined by the law, and its definition of essential is broader than international labor guidelines. The constitution also provides workers the right to bargain collectively, although there are restrictions placed on these rights. The government has discretionary power over the registration of unions and may deny trade union registration on arbitrary or ambiguous grounds.³²

The law prohibits anti-union discrimination and provides for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. However, it has been reported that the government does not enforce relevant laws and penalties for violating anti-union discrimination provisions are not sufficient to deter violations. Despite the government's inability to consistently respect workers' rights with regard to freedom of association and collective bargaining, workers have persisted.³³

Working Conditions

The minimum wage is CFA 40,000 (USD 65) per month, but this is reserved for formal workers. Most of the labor force is employed in the informal or subsistence sectors where such provisions do not apply.³⁴

The legal workweek is 40 hours; for the agricultural sector, it ranges between 42 and 48 hours. Although legal limits on the hours of work applies to all workers, including migrant and domestic workers, it is reported to be routinely ignored in the informal sector which accounts for 93 percent of workers.³⁵ Informal sector workers lack legal protection of wages, health and safety, as well as access to employee insurance schemes.³⁶ The Ministry of Labor and Public Service is unable to uphold these standards effectively due to a lack of resources.³⁷

Discrimination

The law prohibits discrimination in employment based on race, disability, religion, political opinion, national origin, citizenship, social origin, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, age, or language, but the U.S. Department of State reports that these laws are not always enforced, and that discrimination occurs in practice on ethnic grounds against Tuaregs or on gendered grounds against women.³⁸ The Labor Code mandates equal pay for men and women for work of equal value.



Forced Labor

The law prohibits only some forms of forced or compulsory labor.³⁹ While it prohibits hard labor and the nonconsensual contracting of labor, the law does not define hereditary slavery and therefore does not prohibit it.⁴⁰ The salt mines of Tauodeni subject Songhai men and children to debt bondage, and Black Tuareg communities often face hereditary slavery. Penalties are seldom enforced, and the government has made little effort to stop forced labor practices.⁴¹

Child Labor

The constitution of Mali provides that children are entitled to tuition-free, universal and compulsory education from ages seven through 16. The minimum age for employment is 15 but employment may occur at ages 12 to 14 with certain exceptions.⁴² According to the U.S. Bureau of International Labor Affairs, only 49.6 percent of children complete their primary education. However, 49.2 percent of children work, primarily in the gold, cotton, and rice industries.⁴³

With regard to hazardous work, children under 18 are not allowed to be employed in what are deemed to be hazardous activities unless they receive adequate specific instruction or vocational training in the activity and are between the ages of 16 and 17.⁴⁴ However, the U.S. Department of State has noted that the law conflicts with the protections provided in the Hazardous Occupations List, as it is possible for children the age of 14 to be working in hazardous conditions.⁴⁵

In Mali, it has been reported that child labor is concentrated in the agricultural sector for commodities such as rice and cotton, domestic services, and other sectors of the informal economy.⁴⁶ The U.S. Department of State notes that the most pressing issue regarding child labor is children's employment in the artisanal mining sector, where some 45,000 children worked under harsh and hazardous conditions, as well as hereditary slavery of Black Tuaregs ("Bellah").⁴⁷

Civil Society Organizations

Freedom House reports that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate freely and without state interference. However, international observers report that larger, more established NGOs may have ties with the political elite, which diminishes the ability of smaller NGOs to compete for government funding.⁴⁸



Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants⁴⁹

ILO 29 Forced Labor	In force
ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize	In force
ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining	In force
ILO 100 Equal Remuneration	In force
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	In force
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	In force
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	Not ratified

Immigration Policies Limiting the Employment Options or Movement of Migrants

While there is not conclusive evidence of what policies impact employment options or movement of all migrants, it was reported that in March 2015 that 8,000 refugee children born in Mali were allowed access to public services, sign employment contracts, buy and sell land, set up companies and borrow from banks. Current Malian laws relating to wages, work hours, and occupational safety also apply to migrant workers.⁵⁰

Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Since 2012, Mali has been in a widespread civil conflict between its government and various rebel groups. Mali scores a 99.5 in the 2023 Fragile States Index, placing it in the “Alert” category, a slight worsening from the country’s score in 2022 which was a 98.6.⁵¹ Instability spread throughout the country as a result of the proliferation of armed groups who carried out attacks, namely the rise of the Islamic State in the Sahel.⁵² Continued violence in the north against armed groups and the Malian military have threatened the lives of many of its residents.⁵³

According to the UN, due to ongoing fighting and insecurity in the regions of Gao, Kidal, Ségou and Timbuktu, schools in the area were closed with no alternatives provided and, in some cases, were occupied by armed groups. As of August 2021, there have been 1,664 school closures.⁵⁴

The U.S. Department of State reports that during rebel occupation of northern regions, armed groups recruited child combatants and children remained involved with these groups during the 2016 reporting year.⁵⁵ As of 2022, children continue to be recruited by both Malian armed forces and armed rebel groups, with a total 352 children reportedly recruited into combat.⁵⁶



Level of Corruption

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2022 scores Mali as a 28 out of 100, where 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and 100 signals “Very Clean.” Mali is ranked 137 out of 180 countries on that same index.⁵⁷ The U.S. Department of State reports that officials engage in corruption with impunity and that corruption is pervasive since territorial control by the Malian government is weak. Currently, the government controls only 20 percent of Mali’s territory, with the rest being either in dispute or in control by armed rebel groups.⁵⁸ Therefore, there is limited capacity to control corruption or the misuse of funds and resources.⁵⁹

Level of Crime and Violence

The World Economic Forum *Global Competitiveness Report* ranks Mali at 113 out of 138 and 114 out of 138 for business costs of crime and violence and organized crime, respectively, with the lowest score, 138, indicating the highest costs of crime onto businesses and highest rates of organized crime.⁶⁰ These reports indicate that crime and violence heavily impedes on business in Mali, and that organized crime groups operate throughout the country. The U.S. Department of State reports that the instability in northern regions has permitted terrorist groups to inflict violence on civilians and security forces.⁶¹ Peacekeepers were also a target of armed groups. In 2023, an armed group attack in northern Mali killed one UN peacekeeper and injured eight others.⁶²

State Persecution

Malian women reportedly do not have the right to pass their nationality on to their children in instances where the children’s father is not a Malian citizen.⁶³ Per the Norwegian Refugee Council, 148,000 displaced Malian children do not have birth certificates.⁶⁴ Lack of birth certificates may impact access to government resources and services, which may contribute to children’s economic need to engage in child labor.

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

Mali scores in the low human development category, according to the UN Human Development Index (HDI), with a rank of 186 out of 191 countries and a score of 0.428, where 0 means low human development and 1 means high human development.⁶⁵ The HDI is calculated with the factors of life expectancy at birth, gross national income per capita, and both expected and mean years of schooling. Most migrants from Mali are destined for Côte d’Ivoire or Nigeria, who have a comparatively higher HDIs of 0.550 and 0.535 respectively.⁶⁶



Level and Extent of Poverty

Mali has a high level of poverty, with 68.3 percent of the population determined to be living in multi-dimensional poverty according to the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative.⁶⁷ When adjusted for inequality, the Human Development Index score falls to 0.291, a loss of 32.0 percent due to inequality.⁶⁸ About three million people face food insecurity in Mali and the situation is exacerbated by armed groups who impede access to humanitarian assistance and healthcare.⁶⁹

Degree of Gender Inequality

In Mali, women face economic discrimination due to societal norms, with particular impact in terms of access to education and employment. The UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) scored Mali as a 0.613 and ranked it 155 out of 170 countries in the 2021 index.⁷⁰ Girls had lower school enrollment rates compared to boys enrollment due to poverty and cultural preference to educate boys, early marriage of girls and sexual harassment of girls.⁷¹ There is a disparity between men and women with respect to secondary levels of education; 9.4 percent of adult women have completed secondary education compared to 15.3 percent of men as of 2020.⁷²

In Mali, men and women legally have equal opportunity to hold title to land through the 2000 Land Tenure Law. To further bolster equality in access to land, the government implemented the Agricultural Law of 2006 which ensures the promotion of gender equality in the agricultural sector, especially among vulnerable groups.⁷³ Despite these measures, the laws are not strongly enforced as most Malian women's access to land is subject to customary or religious law, where men enjoy primary rights to land.⁷⁴ In the 2023 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), men own 59 percent of the total land owned by citizens in Mali.⁷⁵ Regarding non-land assets, men and women are constitutionally granted the same rights, although this is not practiced in reality due to discrimination and women's lack of knowledge of their rights.

While there are no legal restrictions on women's access to financial services, women have unequal access because of low incomes and inability to provide collateral to access bank loans. Micro-credit programs have improved women's access to credit.⁷⁶

Landlessness or Dispossession

Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced due to conflict in the north. There are a total 380,000 internally displaced people, with the number increasing due to civil conflict.⁷⁷ The International Organization for Migration reports that its efforts to reintegrate IDPs will include community stabilization activities, rehabilitation of damaged houses, and promotion of social cohesion.⁷⁸



Environmental factors

Mali's territory is about 65 percent desert or semi-desert, with the country's average rainfall having dropped by 30 percent from 1998 to 2015.⁷⁹ In 2021, Mali had its lowest rate of precipitation in five years.⁸⁰ The increasing drought – which is thought to be linked to climate change – particularly impacts regions of Northern Mali where political instability can exacerbate challenges in accessing humanitarian aid.⁸¹ Traditional cultural migration patterns have increasingly been impacted by climate change. Increasing temperatures and desertification have worsened agricultural production, leading many rural communities to seek better conditions elsewhere. Climate change has been reported to impede preexisting migration that is dependent on pastoral or nomadic movement.⁸²

Documented Trafficking Risk in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Cotton

Cotton Overview

Mali is one of the largest cotton producers in Africa.⁸³ ⁸⁴ Nearly 70 percent of the Malian population is employed in agriculture with close to 40 percent of Mali's rural population employed in cotton production.⁸⁵ Cotton is among Mali's top exports, however, there has been a decline in cotton yields in recent years. The exported value from Mali sharply declined from USD 474 million in 2018 to USD 89 million in 2022.⁸⁶ Despite the cotton's prevalence, many of the smallholder farmers producing cotton experience lack of food and economic security.⁸⁷ The dependence on cotton paired with declining exports may increase economic desperation and reliance on cheap labor, including child labor and force labor as a result of trafficking.⁸⁸

Documented TIP Risks in Cotton

The U.S. Department of State has reported that children are trafficked from Mali to neighboring countries to engage in forced labor on cotton and cocoa plantations.⁸⁹ The U.S. Department of Labor reports that cotton is produced with child labor in Mali and that there are instances of worst forms of child labor in other agricultural sectors within the country.⁹⁰

Gold

Gold Overview

Gold is Mali's top export. In 2021, gold grossed USD 9.03 billion and accounted for 96.3 percent of Mali's exports.⁹¹ Mali is Africa's third largest producer of gold after South Africa and Ghana. Mali's gold sector has expanded far beyond the predictions of industry experts in 2016.⁹² There are several large foreign owned mining operations in Mali.⁹³



Documented TIP Risks in Gold

While Trafficking in Persons has not been identified in gold supply chains in Mali, child labor and forced child labor have been documented. The Department of Labor found that children in Mali are engaged in worst forms of child labor in gold mining.⁹⁴ The U.S. Department of Labor's annual report of goods produced with forced and child labor lists that gold is produced with child labor in Mali.⁹⁵ Children are involved in various aspects of the gold mining process, including digging shafts, ore extraction, and mixing gold ore with mercury.⁹⁶ The U.S. Department of State has reported that boys migrating to Mali from Guinea and Burkina Faso are engaged in forced labor in artisanal gold mines.⁹⁷ The U.S. Department of State has also reported that women and girls are vulnerable to forced labor in gold mining in addition to other sectors.⁹⁸



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