

Country Strategy Evaluation – Executive summary **Mali 2018 – 2022**



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PURPOSE, SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

UNHCR's Evaluation Office commissioned an evaluation of the country strategy for Mali to determine its relevance, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency, and sustainability. This evaluation serves the dual purpose of promoting learning and accountability. The evaluation's findings and recommendations will feed into UNHCR Mali multi-year strategy (2023-2026).

The primary audience for this evaluation is the UNHCR operation in Mali (representative and management, operational and technical teams) and the UNHCR regional bureau for West and Central Africa (RBWCA). The secondary audience are all the institutions, agencies, and organizations involved in the direct or indirect implementation of UNHCR operations in Mali. Finally, the tertiary audience are refugees and asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless persons, and internally displaced persons.

The evaluation has four objectives: 1) To analyse the relevance of the Multi Year Multi Partner Protection and Solution Strategy (MYMPPSS) over the period 2018-2022; 2) To present evidence of how UNHCR's actions have facilitated access to relevant and tailored assistance and protection for refugees, IDPs, returnees, and stateless people, and to assess their impact; 3) Determine the extent to which UNHCR's capacities, structures and processes are aligned and adapted to the implementation of the strategy; 4) Document lessons learned and recommendations for improving UNHCR's actions over the 2023-2026 planning period.

In line with the purpose and objectives of the evaluation, it adopts both a summative and formative approach. The evaluation team employed a "realist" approach that allowed for in-depth analysis while focusing on the usefulness of the results to support learning and their short and medium-term application. Data was collected both in the field and online, using a mixed methods approach. 433 key informants were consulted through semi-structured interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD). This information was supplemented and triangulated using a literature review, relevant datasets, and a co-creation workshop.

To structure the analysis, data and results were grouped and reviewed by evaluation question, area of enquiry and triangulated by data type, method, data source and evaluator. Quality control was based on UNHCR Evaluation Quality Guide, UNEG standards, ALNAP, and OECD/DAC good practices. It was carried out internally by the evaluation team and externally by UNHCR. The evaluation followed the guidelines on mainstreaming gender equality and human rights principles according to the UNEG manual (2011).

FINDINGS

EQ.1. To what extent has UNHCR's work and choice of priorities been relevant in Mali, given the contextual changes, the scale and evolution of the needs of forcibly displaced people, and the interventions of other actors?

UNHCR Mali operates in an unstable socio-political context. UNHCR relies on strategic partnerships with institutional and field actors to identify the priority needs of stateless people, internally displaced people, refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees. UNHCR strengthened state capacities and aligned itself with national priorities in partnership with the government of Mali.

Key factors driving the prioritization of UNHCR interventions include the low level of financial resources, the unstable political context, growing insecurity, regional instability in the Sahel, the changing nature of Mali's relations with other neighboring countries, climate change, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the departure of MINUSMA.

The priorities and operations of UNHCR Mali during the period under evaluation aligned with the general orientations of UNHCR's framework documents by ensuring the provision of basic social services, seeking to improve social cohesion, and working towards a context conducive to the establishment of durable solutions.

UNHCR Mali has shown flexibility in its responses, particularly during the COVID-19 period and in emergency situations.

Overall, stakeholders recognize UNHCR's added value, particularly in the area of protection and the support provided to refugees. Protection is very important in UNHCR's advocacy with the various coordination bodies, but the desired impact is not always achieved. The same applies to the issue of refugees - which lacks visibility - and to the work carried out with the IOM and the UNDP on durable solutions, where commitments remain at the strategic level but struggle to become operational.

UNHCR Mali is very present at coordination meetings and plays its part in the clusters for which it is responsible.

EQ.2. How effective and efficient has UNHCR's programming and advocacy been in Mali?

UNHCR has worked to strengthen the protection system in Mali, but the results have been uneven. Expected progress on legal protection frameworks has not materialized. UNHCR's support for creating centers for displaced people has strengthened the country's capacity to receive and assist displaced people. Documented refugees have had improved access to essential services, healthcare, financial services, and better living conditions in secure camps, but the centralized process of issuing identity and travel documents has limited the number of people who can benefit.

The community-based protection approach has been a success, generating practices that can be capitalized on (e.g., psychosocial support based on the involvement of community focal points). However, UNHCR's activities to assist survivors of GBV are still insufficient, and the coverage of referral mechanisms could be improved. The support procedure for persons with special needs exists but is perceived as slow, with uneven and limited coverage.

The humanitarian aid UNHCR provides falls short of fully meeting the basic needs of the targeted populations, primarily due to insufficient funding. UNHCR's CBI program has had a positive impact in covering the immediate needs of beneficiaries. Still, many feel that the cash transfer process is too slow and that the CBI's contribution to empowering people has not been documented. UNHCR's assistance with shelter, health care, water management, hygiene, and sanitation initiatives has helped to improve living conditions, albeit limited to the localities and communities covered and within the means available. UNHCR's support for the government's Naata settlements initiative to accommodate the growing number of IDPs has had mixed results.

Thousands of children have been (re)integrated into the Malian school system, and access has improved, especially in primary education. Challenges remain in terms of access to secondary and technical education for vulnerable people, with persistent gaps between girls and boys and very high wastage between primary and secondary levels.

The schooling of Malian refugee children in Mauritania using the Malian curriculum seems to limit their integration into Mauritanian society.

UNHCR did not have enough workforce to meet the growing needs. The declaration of the L2 emergency was a key factor in strengthening the national office. Inadequate staffing has limited UNHCR's work in areas where conflict has intensified. Gender equity has not been sufficiently taken into account in UNHCR staffing.

Regionalization/decentralization has helped to bring decision-making closer to forcibly displaced populations. This proximity has increased RBWCA's knowledge of the Malian context, improved the agility of the response, and increased field visits and technical support. However, there is still work to be done to increase decision-making autonomy within the national office and for RBWCA to provide overall strategic guidance to the national office, particularly in the context of the Sahel strategy.

The departure of MINUSMA will significantly and negatively impact the lives of forcibly displaced people and UNHCR's ability to serve them.

EQ.3. To what extent has UNHCR Mali acted sustainably in ensuring the transition from humanitarian assistance to viable solutions for people in forced displacement and at risk of statelessness?

Despite funding from mainly governmental donors and negotiated at the global or regional level, UNHCR Mali has adopted an approach of seeking locally distributed funds. Some projects, such as the sustainable energy project, have been funded in this way.

UNHCR Mali is still finding it challenging to communicate effectively and make its activities visible to donors in Mali.

Multi-annual programming does not seem to have changed its planning, with projects funded on an annual basis. Therefore, and despite UNHCR's new multi-year programme, projects and agreements with partners are generally funded on an annual basis, which means that not only is planning short, but also the funds allocated are used more to respond to urgent and short-term needs than to find lasting solutions, which does not facilitate continuity and the transition from humanitarian assistance to solutions.

UNHCR Mali has realized the importance of integrating environmental issues into its strategy. While UNHCR's country strategy (2018-2022) made no reference to climate aspects and did not define specific guidelines for including environmental issues in its activities, the new strategy has taken into account UNHCR's progress at global level and the particular challenges of the context.

UNHCR has integrated mitigation and adaptation measures into its field activities to limit pressure on water and wood resources, both collectively and individually (solar kits, kitchen kits, radios, solar lighting, and water infrastructure).

Efforts are being made to integrate environmental issues into procurement procedures and the construction of shelters and housing. Nevertheless, certain practices should be systematized and better documented.

CONCLUSIONS

Strategic level

CS1. Malian legislation does not comply with international standards relating to refugees, IDPs and stateless persons (objective 1 of the MYMPPSS 2018-2022 strategy).

CS2. UNHCR has promoted the centrality of protection among humanitarian and development actors operating in central and northern Mali. By adopting a pragmatic approach focused on building robust connections and partnerships with local and national institutions and NGOs, UNHCR has expanded its presence, reaching inaccessible and unsafe areas, although coverage remains partial.

CS3. With the withdrawal of MINUSMA, other agencies and NGOs are turning to UNHCR field offices to fill the gaps in service provision and operational support that have hitherto been provided by MINUSMA (e.g. logistics, transport, etc.). UNHCR field offices are currently not equipped to handle a possible increase in workload in an environment that could become increasingly unstable and insecure.

CS4. UNHCR has reaped many benefits from regionalization and decentralization, particularly greater autonomy in decision-making and excellent technical support from RBWCA. However, the same is not true at the strategic level.

CS5. Despite the will to operationalize environmental considerations and sustainable energy, at the operational level, UNHCR's actions show a certain dispersion without having thought through and prioritized the actions that could have the most impact.

Operational level

CO1. UNHCR has implemented holistic interventions covering the humanitarian and development phases to address the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless people. These interventions have positively impacted those who have received assistance; however, the assistance provided has not covered all basic needs (e.g., shelter and CBI in relation to family size). Overall, the scope of assistance provided by UNHCR was not commensurate with the growing needs (in number and intensity) of the people it serves.

CO2. The interventions implemented by UNHCR and its partners within the framework of the country strategy integrate political orientations both in the provision of humanitarian assistance and durable solutions. However, the involvement of certain technical government departments at regional and local levels remains timid and uneven, which hampers the operational capacities of UNHCR and its implementing partners, leading to a corresponding decrease in these capacities.

CO3. The consultation process has not been inclusive enough with local authorities, which has affected UNHCR's ability to successfully implement its local integration strategies, as evidenced by the lack of occupation of Naata settlements. It has also meant that UNHCR has not taken full advantage of existing opportunities to integrate refugees.

CO4. Although the shelter and NFI sector has been one of the best-funded in recent years, the vast shelter needs in Mali far exceed the capacity of the shelter sector and UNHCR (the largest sector partner in the country) to respond.

CO5. Implementing UNHCR's activities relies on its many partners, which may have consequences for achieving results.

CO6. UNHCR has supported forcibly displaced populations in gaining access to the social protection system, focusing mainly on urban refugees and those in the Kayes region, by enabling them to join health insurance schemes.

CO7. Other UN agencies, international and national NGOs, and donors in Mali are only partially aware of the nature and scope of UNHCR's work in Mali and how it assists the different categories of forcibly displaced people.

CO8. By supporting education in Mali, in particular, by rehabilitating classrooms in certain host villages and by strengthening social cohesion between children from refugee and host communities through the improvement of school infrastructure and the distribution of school kits, UNHCR has contributed to an increase in school attendance by refugee children and has thus improved access to education.

CO9. The schooling strategy for Malian refugee children in the Mbera camp (Mauritania) according to the Malian programme, although commendable from the point of view of facilitating reintegration into Malian society for those who could voluntarily return to Mali in the future, is a barrier to potential integration into Mauritanian society.

Organisational level

COrg1. UNHCR's difficulty in mobilizing sufficient resources to meet the needs of forcibly displaced people, affected by a conflict that has progressively worsened, has been a critical bottleneck for operational and organizational performance at the country level.

COrg2. Collaboration between UNHCR Mali and UNHCR Mauritania has been active and effective at the operational and technical levels. However, at the organizational level, the fact that each CO reports to a different regional bureau limited alignment in the context of the Sahel crisis.

COrg3. In some of its field offices, UNHCR does not appear to have the required staff to achieve its objectives.

COrg4. The closure of MINUSMA clinics and hospitals forces UNHCR (and UN agencies) to rely on the Malian health system to provide health services to its staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic level

Resource mobilization, advocacy, and communication

SR1. Develop and operationalize an external relations and resource mobilization strategy, in line with the Regional Resource Mobilisation Strategy, which highlights UNHCR Mali's activities in favor of IDPs, refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people to humanitarian and development donors (at national, regional and global level) to raise additional funds.

UNHCR's position on integrating environmental issues

SR2. Enhance the integration of environmental considerations into strategic planning and collaboration with other UN agencies specializing in climate action. Conduct systematic assessments prior to interventions and improve the relay of technical support from the RBWCA to the operational level.

Operational level

Protection

RO1. Improve conditions of access to registration by locating resources at the borders, continue to support the authorities in strengthening the legislative framework, participate more actively in the GBV and child protection sub-clusters, and support the national commission in charge of refugees to issue biometric travel documents.

UNHCR's position on refugees' access to education

RO2. Advocate for the inclusion of refugee children in the Malian education system, improve education services in host areas, collaborate with partners such as UN agencies, development agencies, and the Ministry for the vocational training of young people, and ensure the inclusion of Malian refugee children in the Mauritanian education system.

Formalisation of a durable solutions strategy

RO3. Operationalize the durable solutions strategy by facilitating ownership by the government of Mali through tools and joint working mechanisms, as well as with national and international NGOs. Strengthen the multi-sectoral nature of interventions in Mali, focusing on the social and economic inclusion of forcibly displaced people.

Dynamics of population movements, strengthening the capacity for advocacy and evidence-based decision-making

RO4. Establish a joint strategy for monitoring mixed movements with partners. Strengthen exchanges with IOM to improve referral mechanisms for forcibly displaced populations. Strengthen operational coordination in field offices with other UN agencies.

Local anchoring

RO5. Include refugees and displaced people in Socio-Economic and Cultural Development Plans (PDSEC). Enhance collaboration with local stakeholders to identify effective solutions for socio-professional training and integration into the workforce. Implement the roadmap for social protection. Involve the government's technical services more closely in shelter interventions and develop local mechanisms for maintenance.

Organisational level

Positioning of UNHCR Mali in its links and coordination mechanisms with the regional level and with UNHCR Mauritania

ROrg1. Strengthen the coherence of exchanges between UNHCR Mali, RBWCA, and UNHCR Mauritania to improve coordination and action regarding the situation in the Sahel.

Organization of human and logistical resources

ROrg2. Balance the gender distribution of human resources within the operation, strengthen the necessary expertise and respond to needs on the ground.