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From Begging in the Streets to Financial Autonomy: The Inspiring Journey of Fatoumata. A Malian refugee in Ouagadougou, Fatoumata arrived with no resources, living on the streets and begging to feed her seven children. Through resilience and determination, she was able to rise above these hardships, start a small business, and regained independence. Today, just like the cloth she patiently weaves with her own hands, Fatoumata is weaving a new life of dignity, resilience, and hope for her family.

Operational Context

According to government data, as of 31 March 2023, over 2 million people were IDPs in Burkina Faso and the country also generously hosts over 41,500 refugees, mainly from Mali, as of 31 March 2025. Several regions remain affected by insecurity, limiting access to essential services and livelihoods. In Djibo, Sahel region, which hosts nearly 20 per cent of the refugee population, the situation remains critical. Some refugee households have relocated to perceived safer areas such as Bobo-Dioulasso, increasing pressure on local services and host communities. Despite these challenges, UNHCR continues to operate in high-risk areas in close coordination with local authorities.

At the same time, returns of IDPs to areas of origin have gained momentum. As of 31 December 2024, authorities reported the return of over 1 million people to their areas of origin. This positive

development suggests a gradual improvement in the situation of certain regions, while also emphasizing the need for sustained support to ensure safe and dignified reintegration conditions. Key priorities include access to essential social services, civil documentation, and protection mechanisms.

UNHCR continues to advocate for an integrated approach to assistance in return areas, co-developing targeted interventions with local partners.

In this challenging humanitarian context, the suspension of U.S. humanitarian funding in January 2025 has created a significant funding gap. With over 60 percent of its funding from the U.S. over the last three years, UNHCR has had to revise its 2025 priorities to sustain core protection and assistance. UNHCR is prioritizing critical interventions, focusing on vulnerable populations, and reinforcing local partnerships. Advocacy with national authorities will continue to sustain humanitarian efforts and further mitigate vulnerabilities.

Protection Monitoring Highlights :

- **568** incidents documented, showing a 19% decrease compared to last quarter of 2024 (705 incidents).
- **2,071** individuals directly affected: (54% men, 31% women, 6% boys, 9% girls).
- **1/5** heads of household reported feeling unsafe in their community, with 58% citing terrorist activities as the main cause.

Main achievements in sectors

Registration and Documentation – In the first quarter of 2025, UNHCR and its partners continued to strengthen access to asylum and legal identity. More than 140 new asylum seekers—primarily from Mali and Niger—were registered, with 56 per cent being women and 57 per cent of children. In parallel, 675 refugees had their identity documents renewed or updated, while 957 new identity cards

were issued in the Centre and Sahel regions to help preserve access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and targeted assistance. A key milestone was the convening of the first ordinary session of the Eligibility Committee in 2025, which issued decisions on four new asylum claims. The session also led to the closure of 146 pending cases, marking an important step in clearing the legacy backlog and improving the efficiency of asylum procedures. Despite access challenges in certain regions, UNHCR maintained close coordination with the National Commission for Refugees (CONAREF) to sustain this work.

Statelessness – UNHCR and its partners are intensifying their efforts to prevent statelessness through a focus on three key areas: (1) access to civil documentation, (2) support for legal and policy developments, and (3) data collection.

While encouraging progress has been made in facilitating access to birth registration and identity documents—with 423 birth certificates delivered between January and March 2025—ongoing efforts to strengthen the legal framework continue. On 23 January, UNHCR addressed the Committee on General, Institutional Affairs and Human Rights of the Transitional Legislative Assembly, to support reflections on reinforcing legal safeguards against statelessness and to encourage consideration of Burkina Faso's accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. UNHCR remains committed to working closely with national authorities, experts, and partners to enhance protection systems and to contribute to ensuring that no one is left without a recognized legal identity.

Education – UNHCR strengthened access to education and skills development for displaced populations. On 20 February, in partnership with the Ministry of Basic Education, Literacy, and Promotion of National Languages, UNHCR secured the integration of the «Sport for Protection» approach in schools to foster social cohesion and mental well-being among displaced and host community students.

Through a collaboration with the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) and SIMPLON Burkina Faso, 14 displaced youths earned digital skills certificates, significantly boosting their employability and access to the digital economy. Moreover, the second Hackathon, organized with the Commission de l'Informatique et des Libertés (CIL) and Orange Burkina Faso, enabled refugees and young Burkinabè IT professionals to develop innovative data protection solutions, advancing digital inclusion and safeguarding the privacy of displaced communities.

Access to Justice – UNHCR, through its partner Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples (MBDHP), is working to enhance legal access for forcibly displaced people those at risk of statelessness, and host communities across six regions. Over 840 people were sensitized on human rights, empowering them to seek protection and assert their rights. Direct legal assistance was provided to 790 people, while 70 detainees including forcibly displaced and host community members received legal support to safeguard due process. Legal aid was also delivered to 13 survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG) ensuring critical protection pathways. Furthermore, family contact was restored for 14 detainees, guaranteeing their right to family unity. UNHCR remains committed to expanding access to justice, ensuring vulnerable populations are better protected and empowered.

Mixed Movements – During the first quarter of 2025, over 3,100 people were identified in mixed movements, including asylum-seekers, IDP in cross-border movements, returnees, and victims of trafficking. Most asylum-seekers came from Mali and Niger, while Côte d'Ivoire accounted for over 55 per cent of outbound IDP flows. Additionally, 19 Nigerian girls, victims of trafficking, were identified and referred to appropriate services. These mixed movements underscore the importance of a route-based response and increased donor support to strengthen protection, reception, and regional coordination across borders.

Emergency, Protection and Life-Saving Assistance

Strengthening Health System Capacity to Reduce Maternal Mortality – With maternal mortality in Burkina Faso at 330 deaths per 100,000 live births, the Ministry of Health activated its Emergency Health Response Operations Center (CORUS). To reinforce national efforts, UNHCR donated \$11,174 (XOF 7.3 million) worth of medical equipment including delivery tables, weighing scales, examination gloves, and sphygmomanometers. This support aims to enhance obstetric care and strengthen health facility capacities in high-need regions. It contributes directly to improving maternal health outcomes for forcibly displaced populations and host communities, reaffirming UNHCR's commitment to supporting national health systems.

Shelter and Non Food Items (NFI) – In the first quarter of 2025, based on displacement alerts from the Rapid Response Operational Coordination Group (G CORR), UNHCR responded to urgent shelter/NFI needs in displacement-affected areas, in coordination with the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR). UNHCR responded to one major displacement alert in the Hauts-Bassins region, where 400 households (over 3,300 people) received shelter kits and essential NFIs, including blankets, mats, jerrycans, kitchen sets, and hygiene kits. This support met immediate survival needs while also reducing protection risks for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and elderly people. Despite funding cuts, UNHCR, as co-lead of the Shelter/NFI Cluster, continues to prioritize support for the 600,000 most vulnerable people identified in the 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). However, with limited resources, UNHCR was only able to respond to one of nearly 30 displacement alerts in 2025. Prolonged funding shortages will severely limit UNHCR's ability to meet shelter and NFI needs, leaving many vulnerable people without critical support.

Solutions

Voluntary Repatriation and Spontaneous Returns

– On March 2025, the fourth Lomé Dialogue took place in Lomé, Togo, bringing together the Governments of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo, alongside UNHCR, to reaffirm their commitment to durable solutions for forcibly displaced populations. The focus was on the voluntary repatriation of Burkinabe refugees, with an emphasis on formalizing the process through tripartite agreements to ensure returns are safe and dignified. The Dialogue led to the endorsement of 21 key recommendations and the development of strategic proposals for a forthcoming high-level conference. A major outcome was the strengthened political will to enhance national asylum systems, with countries committing to take on more responsibility for refugee status determination (RSD), registration, and legal identity issuance. These efforts demonstrate a growing regional commitment to rights-based, long-term solutions through sustained dialogue, technical cooperation, and UNHCR's facilitation.

Livelihoods and Self-reliance – With UNHCR's support, refugee artisans at the Ouagadougou Artisanal Village, where they benefit from year-round exhibition space, showcased their handcrafted products at the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO). Their participation generated nearly XOF 800,000 in revenue. Events like FESPACO provide refugees with crucial opportunities to gain visibility, access new markets, and increase their income. In a context where tourism and cultural sectors are evolving, these platforms provide a significant opportunity for refugee artisans to sustain and grow their businesses. By facilitating access to such opportunities, UNHCR fosters economic self-reliance and promotes durable solutions, integrating refugees into local value chains, enhancing social cohesion, and strengthening long-term livelihood prospects.

Promoting Inclusion of Refugees in National Social Protection Systems – UNHCR is actively supporting the Government of Burkina Faso in the operational rollout of the Unified Social Registry (RSU), a key tool for identifying vulnerable populations and enabling access to social protection. As a member of the RSU Task Force, UNHCR demonstrates its commitment to achieving durable solutions for refugees, particularly through local integration. In collaboration with CONAREF and the RSU’s technical secretariat, ongoing discussions focus on establishing practical approaches for data sharing and refugee registration. While security challenges have caused some delays in implementation, these efforts are a crucial step toward integrating refugees into national policy frameworks and guaranteeing equitable access to essential public services.

Work in Partnerships

Humanitarian Coordination – UNHCR leads the protection and solutions response for refugees and IDPs, ensuring inclusive, coordinated, and protection-centered interventions. Since 2022, under its Multi-Year Multi-Partner (MYMP) strategy 2022-2026, UNHCR has grown its national partnerships from zero to over 30 civil society organizations (CSOs), significantly strengthening local ownership and sustainability. UNHCR leads three critical clusters—Protection, Shelter/NFI, and Camp Coordination Camp Management/Management of temporary sites (CCCM/GSAT) — ensuring coherent multi-sectoral responses. Despite growing needs and funding cuts, UNHCR has effectively streamlined coordination mechanisms, strengthened synergies with national structures, and maintained inter-agency leadership. The signature of a Letter of Understanding (LoU) with UNICEF bolstered joint efforts to protect displaced children and families, with a joint action plan in progress. Collaboration with WFP focused on mitigating funding reprioritization impacts, including advocacy for exceptions to preserve food assistance for vulnerable refugees. These partnerships optimize humanitarian responses by

maximizing impact despite limited resources and growing needs.

Institutional Engagement – Collaboration has been strengthened through strategic exchanges with the CIL and CONAREF to support the implementation of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 2023 commitments. Formalized in September 2024, the partnership with CIL aims to enhance the protection of personal data for forcibly displaced people and those at risk of statelessness. It ensures ethical data management, supporting evidence-based, protection-sensitive responses that are key to achieving durable solutions. In the long term, this partnership will facilitate accurate and secure documentation of displaced populations, contributing to their inclusion in national and regional processes. By supporting the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and GRF 2023 commitments, this partnership plays a critical role in creating a centralized, secure, and rights-respecting data framework, ensuring a sustainable response to forced displacement challenges. A joint GRF workshop is scheduled for May 2025 to review progress, define next steps, and mobilize necessary resources.

National Dialogue – In January 2025, UNHCR, in close collaboration with the Government of Burkina Faso, organized the first International Colloquium on “Forced Displacement in West and Central Africa: Dynamics and Responses” in Ouagadougou. This landmark event brought together over 200 participants, including government officials, UN agencies, researchers, CSOs, and forcibly displaced people, to foster regional dialogue and solutions to forced displacement. Co-organized with the De Mello Research Chair on Forced Displacement in West Africa, a regional academic platform hosted by Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, the colloquium contributed to advancing discussions on protection frameworks, durable solutions, and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus. The event reinforced UNHCR’s leadership in convening cross-sectoral actors and shaping strategic responses in a region facing complex displacement challenges. This initiative

showcased the value of knowledge partnerships in informing evidence-based policies, enhancing local capacities, and promoting inclusive, sustainable responses to displacement.

Partnerships with Local and Development Actors – In alignment with the HDP nexus and the National Strategy for the Recovery of IDPs and Host Communities, UNHCR has deepened partnerships with development actors to foster durable solutions for displaced populations in Burkina Faso. A key collaboration with the NGO Direct Aid, formalized through a LoU in early 2025, builds on successful joint efforts initiated in November 2024, including the construction of a borehole and water infrastructure in Hauts-Bassins region, benefiting both refugee and host communities. This project, located on agricultural land donated by local authorities, fosters self-reliance, social cohesion, and sustainable livelihoods. Additional efforts focus on enhancing agro-sylvo-pastoral support and improving water access for cultivation. Additionally, UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ENABEL to strengthen socio-economic resilience, service access, and community stability. A joint UNHCR-ENABEL mission in the Center-North region identified synergies in vocational training, entrepreneurship, and support to survivors of VAWG. UNHCR also co-developed area-based strategies with local actors to promote durable solutions in return areas, ensuring integrated humanitarian and development support. These efforts underscore UNHCR’s role in operationalizing the HDP Nexus and driving long-term resilience in a dynamic context.

Funding cuts and efficiency measures – The suspension of U.S. humanitarian funding in January 2025 has significantly impacted UNHCR’s response capacity, affecting thousands of vulnerable refugees and IDPs. As a result, UNHCR had to urgently reassess its priorities to maintain essential services. The consequences are already alarming: access to healthcare for refugees has dropped by 50 percent, legal protection is weakening, exposing women and children to heightened risks, and nearly

50 percent of refugee students could be out of school by October 2025, severely compromising their future prospects. At the same time, the sharp reduction in the capacities of humanitarian actors is undermining the coherence and reach of the collective response, while needs on the ground continue to grow. In response to this critical situation, UNHCR is implementing efficiency measures: refocusing on life-saving interventions, concentrating geographically on high-impact areas, strengthening inter-agency coordination, and intensifying advocacy efforts to mobilize new funding and develop sustainable local solutions. Despite the scale of the challenges, UNHCR remains determined to protect the most vulnerable, maintain the quality of its interventions, and maximize humanitarian impact with every available resource.

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USD 110,4 M Required by UNHCR Burkina Faso in 2025

