

Critical life-saving needs

Influx of Refugees from Burkina Faso to Mali

September 2025

© UNHCR/Insa Wawa Diatta

Situation update

The Central Sahel region remains deeply entrenched in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis as escalating security threats force massive population movements across borders. Since 5 August, the Koro area in Mali's Bandiagara region has experienced a dramatic surge in Burkinabè refugees fleeing clashes between armed groups across several border villages.

The numbers tell a stark story of human suffering. By the end of August 2025, Mali hosted nearly 260,000 (including over 158,000 already registered), representing an increase of over 70 per cent since January. In Koro alone, around 51,000 new arrivals have been recorded between April and September, with close to 17,000 people arriving in August, averaging 613 individual per day. On 31 August, UNHCR reported the arrival of over 265 households, approximately 1,500 individuals from the villages of Mené, Bongolé, and Pela in Koro - and more arrived during the first week of September.

UNHCR and partners have mounted an emergency response including refugee registration, distribution and provision of non-food items, emergency shelters and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. To date, 65,000 refugees have been registered in Koro, which will facilitate their access to basic services and referral to protection mechanisms for specific needs.

These refugee families are housed in schools and makeshift shelters or homes. The limited resources of the population and the capacities of the authorities

have become insufficient to meet the urgent needs of the refugees.

The local authorities are willing to make large areas of land available to UNHCR for the construction of shelters and the development of spaces for economic resilience activities.

Since 2023, ongoing insecurity crises have triggered waves of Burkinabe refugees fleeing to Mali. According to authorities and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), if the current trend continues, 20,000 additional refugees are projected to arrive by end-September, bringing the total refugee population in Koro to 110,000 people, representing a 110 per cent increase relative to the local population of 100,400 people.

The compounding effects of insecurity, limited access to basic services, and overstretched host communities signal a critical tipping point. Without immediate and sustained support, the region risks facing a humanitarian overload, with heightened protection risks, deteriorating health conditions, and increased vulnerability among displaced populations.

To prevent further deterioration, UNHCR anticipates that emergency shelter, WASH infrastructure, and protection services will require urgent scaling to meet the needs of incoming refugees. The projected influx will also necessitate expanded registration and documentation efforts, as well as enhanced community-based protection mechanisms, particularly for women, children, and persons with specific needs.

Financial needs

UNHCR urgently needs \$4.76 million to provide life-saving assistance to an estimated 50,000 newly arrived refugees in Mali's Koro area throughout December 2025.



Registration and Documentation (\$437,000)

Activities will focus on biometric registration and documentation for approximately 30,000 refugees, ensuring their access to essential services and protection mechanisms.



Community Based Protection (\$273,000)

This encompasses gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services, child protection initiatives, protection and border monitoring along the Burkina Faso border, and community mobilization efforts designed to strengthen local protective capacity.



Emergency Shelter (\$2,700,000)

UNHCR will deliver cash-based or mixed modality assistance to support 2,200 emergency shelters for the most vulnerable refugee households currently living in unsafe conditions. The intervention features phased cash transfers, technical guidance, and community participation to maintain quality standards while restoring dignity and reducing protection risks.



Cash for Non-Food Items (NFIs) (\$546,000)

Direct cash assistance will enable 5,000 vulnerable households, identified through harmonized vulnerability criteria, to purchase essential non-food items from functional local markets, empowering families with choice and flexibility.



In-Kind NFI Distribution (\$382,000)

Complementing the cash program, in-kind distribution will serve 2,000 households lacking access to functional markets or facing urgent protection needs. UNHCR will pre-position NFI stocks to ensure rapid response capability.



WASH Services (\$393,000)

UNHCR will construct 613 emergency latrines and showers to address critical hygiene gaps affecting 7,253 refugee households. The WASH infrastructure development includes drainage systems, soak pits, and waste management facilities. Additionally, hygiene promotion campaigns will reach 5,000 vulnerable households while water networks are extended to refugee-hosting areas.

Koro stands at the frontline of the Sahel's displacement crisis. With refugee numbers nearly surpassing the host community, the region risks humanitarian collapse unless immediate action is taken. Urgent donor support will ensure that tens of thousands of vulnerable families receive life-saving assistance, while host communities are protected from further strain.

This is a critical moment: timely funding will save lives, preserve dignity, and help stabilize one of the most fragile regions of the Sahel.