

MALI

Country name	Mali
State title	Republic of Mali
Name of citizen	Malian
Official languages ¹	Bambara (bam) ² ; Bobo (bbo); Bozo (boz); Dogon (various); Fula (ful); Hassaniya Arabic (mey); Kassonke (kao); Maninka (various); Minyanka (myk); Senufo (various); Songhay (ses); Soninke (snk); Tamasheq (tmh) ³
Working language ⁴	French (fra)
Country name in official language	Mali
State title in official language	République du Mali
Script	Written in Roman script (and see below)
Romanization System	<i>Not applicable</i>
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	ML/MLI
Capital	Bamako
Population/Area	20.856 million ⁵ / 1.240 192 km ²

Introduction

Mali is a landlocked country in West Africa. Bordered by Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania. A French colony from 1892, it gained independence in 1960. It lies across the Sahel region, with the north of the country in the Sahara Desert and the river Niger flowing through the south.

Geographical names policy

Geographical names are for the most part found in French-style Roman script and should be taken as found on official Malian sources where possible. Maps produced by France's Institut national de l'information géographique et forestière (IGN) or the French Ministry of Defence are good sources when Malian mapping is unavailable. All diacritical marks (see page 2 for details), apostrophes and hyphens should be retained. The difficulties of representing the many different African languages which have influenced the geographical names of the country have inhibited a consistent approach to spellings on many sources. In cases of uncertainty contact PCGN for advice.

¹ <https://sgg-mali.ml/JO/2017/mali-jo-2017-39.pdf>

² Also seen as Bamanankan which is the local name.

³ The ISO 639-3 languages codes are given for the languages mentioned in this Factfile.

⁴ <https://sgg-mali.ml/JO/2023/mali-jo-2023-13-sp-2.pdf>

⁵ UN data, 2021 estimate.

Languages

Prior to 1960, colonial rule by France established French as the language of education and official administration. Post-independence, French remained Mali’s official language until the 2023 constitutional update, which redesignated it as the “working” language of Mali rather than its being official⁶. In practice, French remains widely used in government, administration and education.

Mali now officially recognises 13 national languages (see table below). Among these, Bambara is the most widely spoken, understood by approximately 80% of the population, and serves as the country’s primary national language in education, literature and the media.

Due to Mali’s ethnic diversity, over 50 different indigenous languages are spoken across the country. Some have orthographies based on Roman, Arabic, Tifinagh or N’Ko⁷ scripts, but despite official efforts to promote literacy in national languages⁸, many remain unwritten.

National Languages of Mali

Language	ISO 639-3 Code	Language Group	Script(s)	Alternative names & Language variants
Bambara	bam	Mande (Manding)	Roman, N’Ko	Bamanankan
Bobo ⁹	bbo	Gur (Bobo)	Roman	Konabéré
Bozo	boz	Mande (Bozo)	Roman	Tieyaxo Bozo
Dogon ¹⁰	various (e.g. dts)	Dogon	Roman	Toro So (dts), Jamsay (djm)
Fula	ful	Atlantic (Fula)	Roman, Arabic	Fulfulde, Peul, Pular, Pulaar
Hassaniya Arabic	mey	Semitic (Arabic)	Arabic	Hasanya Arabic, Maure
Kassonke	kao	Mande (Manding)	Roman, N’Ko	Kassonké, Khassonké, Xaasongaxango
Maninka	various (e.g. man)	Mande (Manding)	Roman, N’Ko	Western Maninkakan (mlq), Eastern Maninkakan (mnk)
Minyanka	myk	Mande	Roman	Mamara

⁶ <https://koulouba.ml/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Constitution-promulguee.pdf>

⁷ The N’Ko alphabet was devised in 1949 by Souleymane Kante of Guinea to represent a number of Mande languages (see www.omniglot.com/writing/nko.htm).

⁸ Demonstrated by Law no. 86 AN-RAM creating the Direction nationale de l’alphabétisation fonctionnelle et de la linguistique appliquée (DNAFLA).

⁹ The Malian Constitution lists ‘Bobo’ as a national language. This may refer to either Bobo (bbo) or Bomu (bmq), the latter being more widely spoken in Mali.

¹⁰ Dogon is a language family, multiple Dogon languages are spoken in Mali, but Dogoso (dts) is the variety most spoken.

Language	ISO 639-3 Code	Language Group	Script(s)	Alternative names & Language variants
Senufo ¹¹	various (e.g. spp)	Gur (Senufo)	Roman	Syenara-Sénoufo (shz), Supyire-Sénoufo (spp)
Songhay	ses	Songhay	Roman	Koyraboro Senni Songhay (ses), Songhoï
Soninke	snk	Mande (Soninke)	Roman, Arabic	Sarakolé
Tamasheq	tmh	Amazigh (Berber)	Tifinagh	Tamàsàyt, Tuareg, Tamashek (tmh)

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings¹²):

French (and consequently Malian toponyms) contain the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script¹³:

Upper-case	Unicode encoding	Lower-case	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	à	00E0
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB
Î	00CE	î	00EE
Ï	00CF	ï	00EF
Ô	00D4	ô	00F4
Œ	0152	œ	0153
Ù	00D9	ù	00F9
Û	00DB	û	00FB
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
ÿ ¹⁴	0178	ÿ	00FF

¹¹ The Malian Constitution lists Senufo as a national language. The term ‘Senufo’ refers to a language group. The most widely spoken Senufo language in Mali is Supyire (spp), often referred to as Supyire-Senufo.

¹² See www.unicode.org

¹³ Characters can be manually input into Microsoft word documents by typing in these character codes and then holding down the ALT key and pressing /x/. The code will change to the required character. The letter can be copied and pasted into other programmes if required. Alternatively, the ‘Insert – Symbol’ command can be used; the code can be entered into the ‘Character code’ box which will show the corresponding letter.

A GeoNames Soft-Copy Keyboard can be downloaded from the NGA website and used to enter the required letter-diacritic combinations for a particular region: http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/gns_services.html.

¹⁴ Rarely encountered.

Map of Mali



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

Administrative structure

At first-order administrative level (ADM1) Mali is divided into 19 *régions* (regions) and the capital district of Bamako. The *régions* are sub-divided into *cercles* at the second-order level (ADM2). The *cercles* are further divided into communes and arrondissements at the third-order level (ADM3).

Prior to January 2016, Mali had 8 *régions*. Ménaka and Taoudénit were created in northern Mali in January 2016, as part of the 2015 Algiers peace agreement. Initially, there was no map showing the boundaries of these new regions. In December 2017, the Minister for Territorial Administration, reported that Ménaka and Taoudénit were at an advanced stage of implementation. The 2012 law, creating eleven new regions, came into effect in March 2023, bringing Mali to its current 19-region structure¹⁵.

¹⁵ In 2012 Mali announced a territorial reorganization into 19 regions, adding 11 new regions under Loi No. 2012-017 of 2 March 2012 establishing: Nioro du Sahel, Kita, Dioïla (the law spells it as “Doïla,” but “Dioïla” is more commonly used and PCGN-recommended spelling), Nara, Koutiala, Bougouni, San, Douentza, Bandiagara (<http://mali-web.org/societe/les-nouvelles-regions-du-mali-des-gouverneurs-dans-deux-deja>).

The first-order administrative divisions (ADM1s) of Mali are listed here:

Region (Short Form)	Region (Full Form)	ISO 3166-2 code	Malian Region codes	Code recommended for HMG use ¹⁶	Administrative Centre (PPLA)	Location of Centre	Variant Names	Status
Bamako	District de Bamako	ML-BKO	00	ML-00	Bamako	12° 39' 00" N 008° 00' 00" W	Bko	Existed pre-2016
Bandiagara	Région de Bandiagara	-	19	ML-19	Bandiagara	12° 21' 05" N 003° 36' 53" W		Confirmed March 2023
Bougouni	Région de Bougouni	-	15	ML-15	Bougouni	12° 25' 30" N 007° 29' 06" W		Confirmed March 2023
Dioïla	Région de Dioïla	-	13	ML-13	Dioïla	12° 29' 41" N 006° 47' 53" W	Doïla	Confirmed March 2023
Douentza	Région de Douentza	-	18	ML-18	Douentza	15° 00' 14" N 002° 57' 13" W		Confirmed March 2023
Gao	Région de Gao	ML-7	07	ML-07	Gao	16° 16' 18" N 000° 02' 41" W	Septième Région; Seventh Region; Région VII	Existed pre-2016
Kayes	Région de Kayes	ML-1	01	ML-01	Kayes	14° 26' 49" N 011° 26' 40" W	Première Région; First Region; Région I	Existed pre-2016
Kidal	Région de Kidal	ML-8	08	ML-08	Kidal	18° 26' 28" N 001° 24' 28" E	Huitième Région; Eighth Region; Région VIII	Existed pre-2016
Kita	Région de Kita	-	12	ML-12	Kita	13° 02' 24" N 009° 29' 18" W		Confirmed March 2023
Koulikoro	Région de Koulikoro	ML-2	02	ML-02	Koulikoro	12° 51' 46" N 007° 33' 35" W	Kkoro; Deuxième Région; Second Region; Région II	Existed pre-2016
Koutiala	Région de Koutiala	-	16	ML-16	Koutiala	12° 22' 49" N 005° 28' 11" W		Confirmed March 2023

¹⁶ PCGN typically recommends using ISO 3166-2 subdivision codes for HMG purposes. However, as ISO codes have not yet been allocated for the newest Malian regions, PCGN advises using the nationally recognised Malian codes until official ISO codes become available.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Region (Short Form)	Region (Full Form)	ISO 3166-2 code	Malian Region codes	Code recommended for HMG use ¹⁶	Administrative Centre (PPLA)	Location of Centre	Variant Names	Status
Ménaka	Région de Ménaka	ML-9	10	ML-10	Ménaka	15° 55' 06" N 002° 24' 08" E	-	Established January 2016 – boundaries unconfirmed
Mopti	Région de Mopti	ML-5	05	ML-05	Mopti	14° 29' 21" N 004° 11' 34" W	Cinquième Région; Fifth Region; Région V	Existed pre-2016
Nara	Région de Nara	-	14	ML-14	Nara	15° 10' 01" N 007° 17' 20" W		Confirmed March 2023
Nioro	Région de Nioro	-	11	ML-11	Nioro-du-Sahel	15° 13' 54" N 009° 35' 35" W	Nioro	Confirmed March 2023
San	Région de San	-	17	ML-17	San	13° 17' 52" N 004° 53' 40" W		Confirmed March 2023
Ségou	Région de Ségou	ML-4	04	ML-04	Ségou	13° 25' 54" N 006° 12' 57" W	Quatrième Région; Fourth Region; Région IV	Existed pre-2016
Sikasso	Région de Sikasso	ML-3	03	ML-03	Sikasso	11° 18' 49" N 005° 40' 11" W	Troisième Région; Third Region; Région III	Existed pre-2016
Taoudénit	Région de Taoudénit	ML-10	09	ML-09	Taoudénit	22° 40' 28" N 003° 58' 44" W	Taoudenni; Taoudéni	Established January 2016 – boundaries unconfirmed
Tombouctou	Région de Tombouctou	ML-6	06	ML-06	Tombouctou (Timbuktu)	16° 46' 14" N 003° 00' 20" W	Tombo; Sixième Région; Sixth Region; Région VI	Existed pre-2016

Useful references

- BBC country profile: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1021454.stm
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mali/>
- Ethnologue: <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/ML/>
- FCDO country profile: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/mali>
- Government of Mali: <https://primature.ml/>
- Institut National de la Statistique (INSTAT), Mali: <https://instat-mali.org/fr>
- International Crisis Group: *Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?* Africa Report N°92, 31 March 2005
<https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/icg/2005/en/36320>
- Loi N°2012-017/ du 02 Mars 2012 portant création de circonscriptions administratives en République du Mali: <http://sgg-mali.ml/JO/2012/mali-jo-2012-10.pdf>
- Loi N°99-035/ du 10 août 1999 portant création des collectivités territoriales de cercles et de regions: <https://sgg-mali.ml/JO/2015/mali-jo-2015-20-sp.pdf>
- Loi N°2023-006 du 13 Mars 2023 portant création des circonscriptions administratives en République du Mali: <https://matd.gouv.ml/creation-circonscriptions-administrative-en-republique-mali>
- Mali Constitution 2023: <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/ml2023.htm>
- Mali web portal: <http://www.maliweb.net/index.php>
- Ministère de l'administration territoriale: <http://www.matcl.gov.ml>
- Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of France: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/>
- Omniglot writing systems and languages of the world: <http://www.omniglot.com>
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server (GNS):
<http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/>

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