

Burkina Faso

Country name	Burkina Faso ¹
State title	Burkina Faso
Name of citizen	Burkinabe ² , Burkinan
Official languages	‘National languages’ (see <i>Languages</i> below)
Country name in official languages	Burkina Faso
State title in official languages	Burkina Faso
Script	Roman script (and see below)
Romanization System	Not required
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	BF/BFA
Capital	Ouagadougou
Area / Population	274,200km ² / 22.5 million (2023 est.) ³

Introduction

Landlocked and sharing international boundaries with Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger and Togo, Burkina Faso gained independence as Upper Volta in 1960, changing its name to Burkina Faso in 1984.

Burkina Faso, characterized by a predominantly flat or gently rolling terrain with few significant geographical features, experienced two military coups in 2022. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated significantly as a result of this increased instability: by 2023 almost 2 million people — roughly 8 to 10 percent of the population — were internally displaced⁴.

Geographical names policy

For HMG use, geographical names should be taken from official sources from Burkina Faso, where these are available. Products from the Institut Géographique du Burkina (IGB) would be the most authoritative, and although the IGB [website](#) has good information on the products it makes, it contains no freely accessible geospatial data. IGB has, however, supplied data to the UN Second Administrative Level Boundaries project; this includes a list of ADM1s and ADM2s and this can be seen here: <https://salb.un.org/en/data/bfa>

¹ See page 2 for further details.

² Sometimes Burkinabè, the term is derived from Mossi and Fula, and is commonly used in English as the adjectival form.

³ [Burkina Faso - The World Factbook](#)

⁴ Human Rights Watch <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/burkina-faso>

If no national official sources can be found, maps produced by France’s Institut national de l’information géographique et forestière (IGN) (previously Institut géographique national) or the French Ministry of Defence are good alternative sources.

The [Africa Geoportal](#) may additionally be used as a helpful source of geospatial data and names⁵; the US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) [Geographic Names Server](#) can also be used as a source for names.

Country name and state title

Since 2014, PCGN has recommended the use of Burkina Faso as the country name, as well as the state title, feeling that it is this form that is in more common use. Burkina may also be seen colloquially, including in French-language contexts and within the country itself; this is an acceptable form for informal purposes if so desired.

The name Burkina Faso is a construct from the country’s two major native languages, put together purposely in the new name of the country in 1984. Specifically, *Burkina*, refers to the Burkinabe (people of Burkina Faso), meaning ‘integrity’ in the Mossi⁶ (*mos*) language, and *Faso* meaning ‘land of’ (or literally, ‘father’s house’) in Dioula⁷ (*dyu*). Burkina Faso as a whole means “Land of the upright people”.

Languages

Until 2025, French was the only official language in Burkina Faso, although it is spoken as a home language by only about 2% of the population. However, in a Constitutional amendment in 2025, French has been relegated to the status of ‘working language’ (English also having this status), and the country’s ‘national languages’ have become official. There are an estimated 70 indigenous languages⁸, and four have been denoted as ‘national’ and ‘official’: the country’s most widely spoken language, and de facto lingua franca, is Mossi, spoken by around 50% of Burkinabe. Dioula, Fula (*ful*)⁹ and Bissa are also recognized as official languages, spoken by 6%¹⁰, 8% and 3.3%, respectively.

These languages are officially written with the Roman script, but there are a number of additional writing systems, some recently developed. An alphabet known as N’Ko¹¹ was developed for some Mande languages, including Dioula, in 1949. There has also been the recent development (in 2022) of a Goulsse¹² alphabet for Gur languages, including Mossi. It is unlikely that these writing systems will be encountered on official geospatial products or sources.

⁵ This is a source collated from multiple sources, including Esri, organisations working in Africa and crowdsourced information. It should be used as a supplementary reference.

⁶ Often referred to as Mooré.

⁷ Also Dyula, Djoula or Jula.

⁸ Beyond the recognised national languages, speaker numbers of the most widely spoken of these are estimated at: Gourmantche 6.8%, Gurunsi 3.2%, Bwamu 2%, Dagara 2%, San 1.7%, Marka 1.6%, Bobo 1.5%, Senufo 1.5%, Lobi 1.2%, other 6.6% (2019 est. CIA World Factbook)

⁹ Spoken by the Fulani people, also Peul.

¹⁰ Though a relatively low proportion of L1 speakers, Dioula is quite widely spoken as a second language.

¹¹ To illustrate, the name N’Ko is written ⵏⵙⵓ (from right to left):

<https://www.omniglot.com/writing/nko.htm>

¹² To illustrate, the name Goulsse is written ⵓⵍⵙⵉ: <https://omniglot.com/conscripts/goulsse.htm>

Inventory of Characters (and their Unicode encodings)¹³

French contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

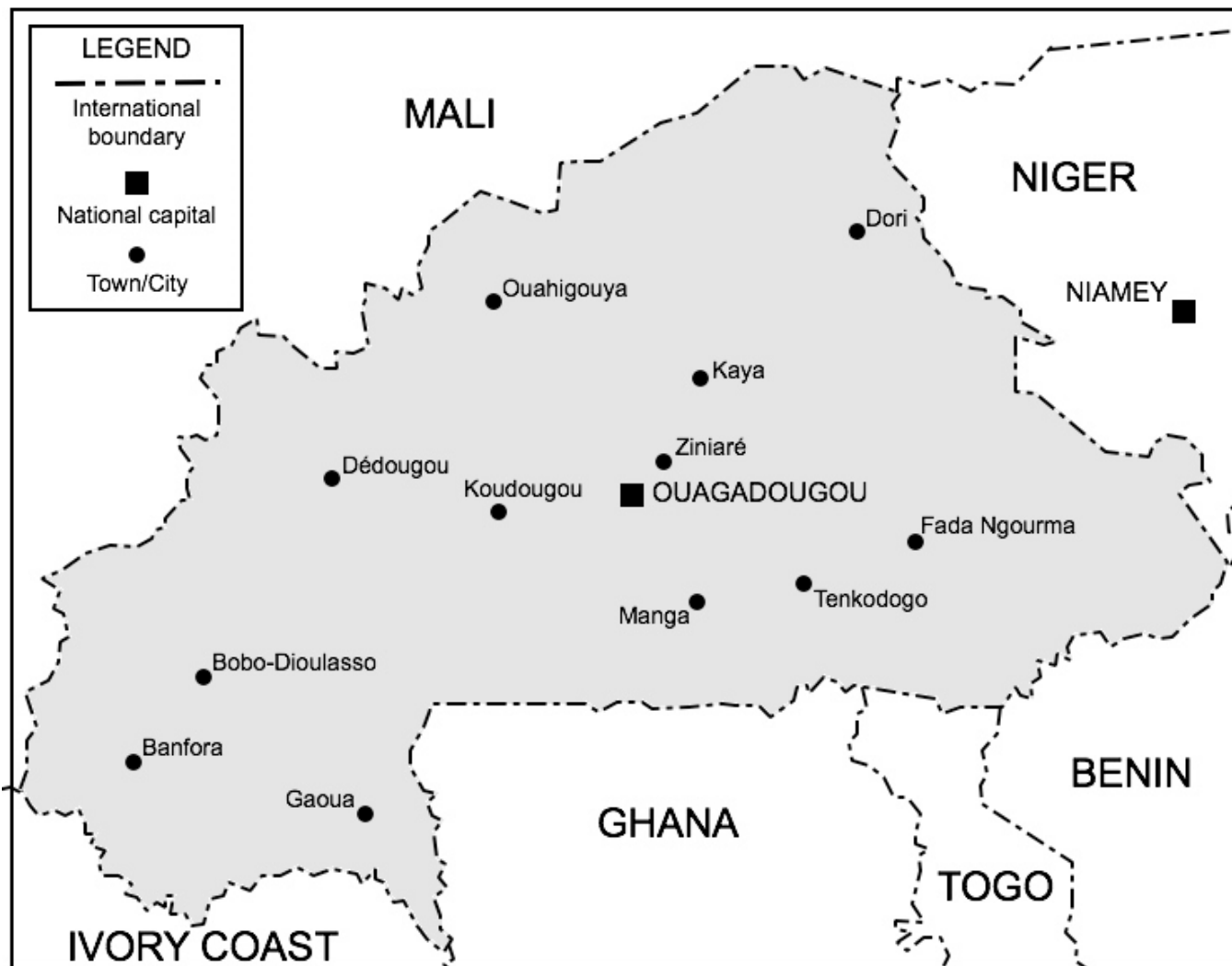
Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	à	00E0
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB
Î	00CE	î	00EE
Ï	00CF	ï	00EF
Ô	00D4	ô	00F4
Œ	0152	œ	0153
Ù	00D9	ù	00F9
Û	00DB	û	00FB
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
ÿ ¹⁴ (U+0178)	0178	ÿ ¹⁴	00FF

¹³ See www.unicode.org

¹⁴ Rarely encountered.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Map of Burkina Faso



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.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Administrative structure

Burkina Faso is divided into several hierarchical levels of administrative division: at the first-order administrative level are *régions*; each region is further subdivided into *provinces*, and provinces are then divided into *départements*. After an administrative reform in July 2025, there are four additional regions, making a total of 17 and two additional provinces, a total of 47.

Though a transition period was envisaged after the new structure's introduction, the list below reflects the alterations. Additionally, again a feature of the country's move away from the official status of French (see *Languages* above), the names of regions and provinces have been altered to reflect national languages. The spellings of these new region names are somewhat discrepant across sources, but the spellings below reflect those in the [Presidential Decree](#); they are shown in the table below with reference to the former French names. HMG products can continue to show both names for reference purposes.

The [ISO 3166-2 standard](#) includes codes for both the regions and provinces of Burkina Faso.

New Région name	Former (French) Région name	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative centre	Location of centre
Bankui	Boucle du Mouhoun	BF-01	Dédougou	12°27'48"N 03°27'39"W
Tannounyan	Cascades	BF-02	Banfora	10°38'00"N 04°46'00"W
Kadiogo	Centre	BF-03	Ouagadougou	12°22'13"N 01°31'29"W
Nakambé	Centre-Est	BF-04	Tenkodogo	11°46'48"N 00°22'11"W
Koulsé ¹⁵	Centre-Nord	BF-05	Kaya	13°05'30"N 01°05'04"W
Nando	Centre-Ouest	BF-06	Koudougou	12°15'09"N 02°21'46"W
Nazinon	Centre-Sud	BF-07	Manga	11°39'49"N 01°04'23"W
Goulmou	Est	BF-08	Fada N'gourma	12°03'42"N 00°21'30"W

¹⁵ Also seen Kuilsé

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

New Région name	Former (French) Région name	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative centre	Location of centre
Guiriko	Hauts-Bassins	BF-09	Bobo-Dioulasso	11°10'38"N 04°17'52"W
Yaadga	Nord	BF-10	Ouahigouya	13°34'58"N 02°25'18"W
Oubri	Plateau-Central	BF-11	Ziniaré	12°34'55"N 01°17'50"W
Liptako	Sahel	BF-12	Dori	14°02'03"N 00°01'57"W
Djôrô	Sud-Ouest	BF-13	Gaoua	10°17'57"N 03°15'03"W
Sirba	<i>None (formed from former Est region)</i>	-	Bogandé	12°58'36"N 00°08'43"W
Soum	<i>None (formed from former Sahel region)</i>	-	Djibo	14°06'04"N 01°37'50"W
Sourou	<i>None (formed from former Boucle du Mouhoun region)</i>	-	Tougan	13°04'00"N 03°04'00"W
Tapoa	<i>None (formed from former Est region)</i>	-	Diapaga	12°04'24"N 01°47'26"E

Other Significant Locations

Though Burkina Faso lacks mountain ranges or extensive bodies of water, a number of features contribute to the country's ecological diversity, supporting ecosystems and human activities.

PCGN Recommended Name ¹⁶	Variant Names/Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Black Volta	Mouhoun, Volta Noire	08°31'00"N 00°01'33"W	River (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Ivory Coast)
Pics de Sindou		10°39'00"N 05°10'00"W	Limestone peaks, geological formation
Red Volta	Nazinon, Volta Rouge	10°33'32"N 00°31'14"W	River (Burkina Faso, Ghana)
Tena Kourou	-	10°45'00"N 05°25'00"W	Hill, Burkina Faso's high point (749m)
White Volta	Nakambé, Volta Blanche	08°42'07"N 00°59'26"W	River (Burkina Faso, Ghana)

Useful references

- Africa Geoportal: <https://www.africageoportal.com/>
- BBC Country Profile (no longer updated): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13072774>
- Burkinabè National Tourist Office – Geography of Burkina: <https://www.ontb.bf/burkina-faso/geographie>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso/>
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- FCDO Geographical Names Index (GNI): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information>
- FCDO Travel Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/burkina-faso>
- Human Rights Watch <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/burkina-faso>
- Institut Géographique du Burkina: <https://www.igb.bf>
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home>
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- UN Second Administrative Level Boundaries: <https://salb.un.org/en/data/bfa>
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: [GNS Search & Download WebApp \(nga.mil\)](https://www.nga.mil)

Compiled by PCGN
www.gov.uk/pcgn
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¹⁶ PCGN usually recommends conventional English names for international features, unless national variants are specifically required, or the relevant countries share an official language.