



Migration Profile

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

A. Executive Summary

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a landlocked country that had a centuries-old tradition of peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims. However, since its independence in 1960, it has been plagued with sectarian violence until the most recent outburst in 2013, which left the country in shambles and unable to fully recover. The signing of a political peace treaty in February 2019, by the different militia groups, was a move towards the right direction in bringing about a sustainable peace. However, the creation of a new coalition raised new concerns.

More than one in five people is displaced, and more than half of the population is in pressing need of assistance. In 2014 during a brief visit to the country, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees described the CAR's condition as 'a humanitarian catastrophe of unspeakable proportions', and to-date the situation has not been improved. By the end of June 2021, 73,645 new CAR refugees were registered in North Ubangi, South Ubangi, and Bas Uele provinces in Chad by UNHCR and the National Commission for Refugees (CNR). The Christian-majority country has a cross-section of its population vulnerable to violence, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and famine.

Since 2015, CAR experienced an on-going decline in the economy over the last 5 years, along with a fall in the GDP growth rate of 0.8% in 2020. With 71% of the population living in poverty, it is projected that by 2021 2.8 million (more than half of the population) will need humanitarian assistance, with 1.9 million people in acute need. Youth unemployment (ages 15–24) in 2019 stood at 6.55%.

CAR remains a transit route for many migrants around the region and a host to several refugees fleeing from persecution from neighbouring countries.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a landlocked country, surrounded by Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, and Cameroon, with a territorial surface of 622,984sq km. After gaining its independence in 1960, the country has been experiencing recurrent military *coups d'état* and political instability. It is

ranked 188 out of 189 countries listed in the 2020 UN Development Programme Human Development Index, making it one of the poorest countries in the world.

CAR has a population of 4,829,764 million people. Before the arrival of Europeans in the late 19th century, distinctions among different ethnic groups were highly fluid, and many thought of themselves as members of a clan. Currently, the population can be divided into the following groups: Baya (28.8%), Banda (22.9%), Mandjia (9.9%), Sara (7.9%), M'Baka-Bantu (7.9%), Arab-Fulani (Peul) (6%), Mbum (6.0%), Ngbanki (5.5%), Zande-Nzakara (3%), other Central African Republic ethnic groups (2%), and non-Central African Republic ethnic groups (1%). Four-fifths of the population professes Christianity as their faith, with Protestant and Independent Christian (51.0%), Roman Catholic (29.0%), traditional beliefs (10.0%), and Muslim (10.0%).

II. International and Internal Migrants

Lately there has been an increase in the number of labour migrants arriving in CAR, as the process to obtain a visa was facilitated by the Bozize government. According to Maastricht University, immigrants in this country are mainly coming from Sudan (24%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (21%), Chad (12%), and France (12%). Between 2015 and 2020, the net migration rate in CAR was 0.4/1,000 people (1.7% of the total population), and female migrants were 47.1%. These migrants have mostly a low level of education and come into the country for unskilled professional reasons. Recently, there have been a few transhumance pastoral leaders who migrate seasonally with their livestock arriving from Cameroon into the Northwest area of the country. They are predominantly Muslim.

There is also a rural-urban migration because of the attraction of the urban lifestyle, and because the only CAR University is in Bangui, the capital. While the socio-economic infrastructures attract migrants into the city, the hardship and unemployment they experience drive people to return to rural areas, where they can pursue a subsistence/agricultural lifestyle. In addition, a lot of migrants from both urban and rural areas, driven by economic opportunities, move into the natural resource sector, working in mines, tobacco plantations, and forests. With such a large number of pastoral nomadic groups, rural-to-rural migration is also evident.

Safety and stability in CAR have improved after the signing of the political agreement for peace and reconciliation between the government and 14 armed groups in February 2019, allowing also the return of refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons). Since 2018, UNHCR has facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 19,353 CAR refugees from the Republic of Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of the Congo, including 12,309 and 4,229 in 2020. These processes were halted in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 border restrictions.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Data on emigration in CAR is almost non-existent. According to the 2020 Knoema estimates, since 2015 the country has had a negative net migration rate (-8.58 per thousand of the population), with more people leaving the country. Most of these emigrants moved to Chad, Cameroon, France, the Republic of the Congo, Mali, the USA, Canada, and other European

countries. In 2013, there were 699 skilled emigrants from CAR in tertiary institutions in 5 countries around the world with France hosting the overwhelming majority (602), 53 in Saudi Arabia, 28 in the United States of America, 9 in South Africa, and 7 in Oman.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees, climate displaced people)

Internal displacement in CAR is largely caused by conflict and violence. Due to the ongoing violence as a result of the 27 December general elections, the country has recorded its highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) since 2014. An estimated 738,000 people, half of whom are children, are currently internally displaced across the country. UNICEF warns that a large-scale displacement leaves children at high risk of grave rights violations, including recruitment and use of children by armed forces and violent groups. Apart from conflict and violence, natural disasters also contribute to internal displacement affecting even more the already precarious situation. From August to September 2019, torrential rains caused flooding in many towns of the country (Paoua, Bambari, Kouango, Mobaye, Bakala, and Bouca), destroying properties and livelihoods and causing massive internal displacements. According to the IOM report, in 2019 more than 20,000 people were internally displaced by floods in Bangui.

CAR is a source of refugees rather than a destination country. As of August 2021, there were 709,425 refugees from CAR hosted in Cameroon (331,287), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (206,346), Chad (121,036), Sudan (27,356), the Republic of the Congo (20,867), and South Sudan (2,345). Refugees in CAR are mostly located in Bangui, Obo, Ndele, and Bambari. The country hosts about 9,181 refugees mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5,557), South Sudan (1,846), Chad (1,055), Sudan (387), Rwanda (218), and not specified (118), and 296 asylum seekers. Refugees in the country usually know the outcome of their status within 30 days of submitting an application and conducting an interview. Although refugees have freedom of movement, CAR has an encampment policy for refugees and most refugees are hosted in seven refugee camps spread out across the country.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

In CAR, human smuggling is uncommon; instead, human trafficking is widespread, as the country is ranked Tier 2 in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) 2021 Report. Human trafficking exploits domestic and foreign victims in CAR and abroad (Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and South Sudan). Perpetrators of human trafficking include transient merchants, herders, and non-state armed groups using children in domestic servitude, sex trafficking, forced labour in agriculture, artisanal gold, diamond mines, shops, drinking establishments, street vending, forced marriages, and forceful recruitment of child soldiers. From 2012, armed groups have recruited more than 17,000 child soldiers mostly from Vakaga, Haute-Kotto, Haut-Mbomou, Nana-Gribizi, Nana-Mambere, and Basse-Kotto. The many militias and armed groups continue to adopt practices of compulsory recruitment of child soldiers and abduct minors for child labour.

VI. National Legal Framework

CAR is part of the Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS) that allows free movement of its nationals within member states.

The government has not yet ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention regarding labour migration. It is a signatory to both the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention), and the 1967 Protocol, and has ratified the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

The 1990 CAR Constitution states that ratified treaties are a higher source of authority than local laws, and the refugee law, which in principle allows refugees to join the labour market, to use social services, hospitals and education facilities, just CAR's nationals. It ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention).

In regards to smuggling and trafficking, CAR ratified both the 2000 UN Protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea, and air, and the 2000 UN Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Article 151 of the penal code criminalizes all instances of trafficking, and offences can be punished with life imprisonment and hard work. However, these legislative frameworks are rarely implemented.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The main ministries handling migration affairs include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Integration, and the Central Africans Abroad which is in charge of relations with the Central African Diaspora, the Ministry of Interior; the Public Security responsible for emigration/immigration and the control of foreigners; and the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights, Keeper of the Seals that is in charge of the problems of human trafficking. The National Refugee Commission (CNR) under the Ministry of Interior grants asylum according to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

The Catholic Church

CAR has nine dioceses: Alinado, Bambari, Bangassou, Berberati, Bossangoa, Bouar, Kaga-Bandoro, Mbaiki, and also includes one archdiocese, Bangui.

The Roman Catholic Church plays an important role in bringing peace and justice within the country with its humanitarian mission and promotion of human rights activities, and through its organisations such as the *Commission Episcopale Justice et Paix* (CEJP) and its radio station - *Radio Notre Dame*, and women's associations like the *Association des Femmes Croyantes Médiatrices de la Paix*. The Church has also defended prisoners and oppressed people in Bangassou, Bangui, and Bouar and was successful by meeting with the then-rebel leader Bozize during the 2002 and 2003 war between the government and rebel troops, in

her attempt to bring peace to the country. For these activities, the Roman Catholic Church became the recipient of the UN peace-building Office (BONUCA) prize for human rights. Before its attack and destruction on November 15, 2018, the Roman Catholic Church had a refugee camp in the Diocese of Alinado, which sheltered more than 26,000 people.

The Catholic Church's presence is also felt through its numerous programs/projects pioneered by organisations like the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Caritas, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and the *Commission Episcopale pour la Migration* (CEMIR).

JRS provides education, social cohesion, reconciliation, interreligious dialogue, and relief assistance. It is also involved in reconciliation efforts among the warring factions through its media platform in Lobaye and Ouaka, and the JRS Bambari training centre where needlework, literacy, soap making, and other income generation activities are offered along with regular psychosocial support. In line with the vision of Pope Francis for the need to work towards peace and reconciliation during his apostolic visit CAR in 2015, CRS has adhered to this invitation by developing peace-oriented education programs (the social cohesion of internally displaced persons and communities, the peaceful coexistence among the different socio-religious communities, the formation of leaders for the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts, psychosocial support and professional formation for demobilized child soldiers) in Lobaye, Bangui and the central region of Bambari.

The *Commission Episcopale pour la Migration* (CEMIR) welcomes, protects, promotes, and integrates IDPs, refugees, migrants and victims of human trafficking living in CAR. They welcome and protect through the creation of a training college for teachers working for schools educating displaced children. They promote and integrate through joint initiatives, for example with Caritas, by offering professional training for young IDP women in Bambari and its surroundings

CRS has provided mental support through its organised trauma healing workshop projects, people to people or *Itna na Itna* supported by USAID, and vocational training of 350 youths supported by Central African Interfaith Peacebuilding Partnership (CIPP) in order to rebuild people's lives after losing everything as a result of war. Caritas also helps the most vulnerable by providing food, medication, education, hygiene kits, and vocational training to over 50,000 people.

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