

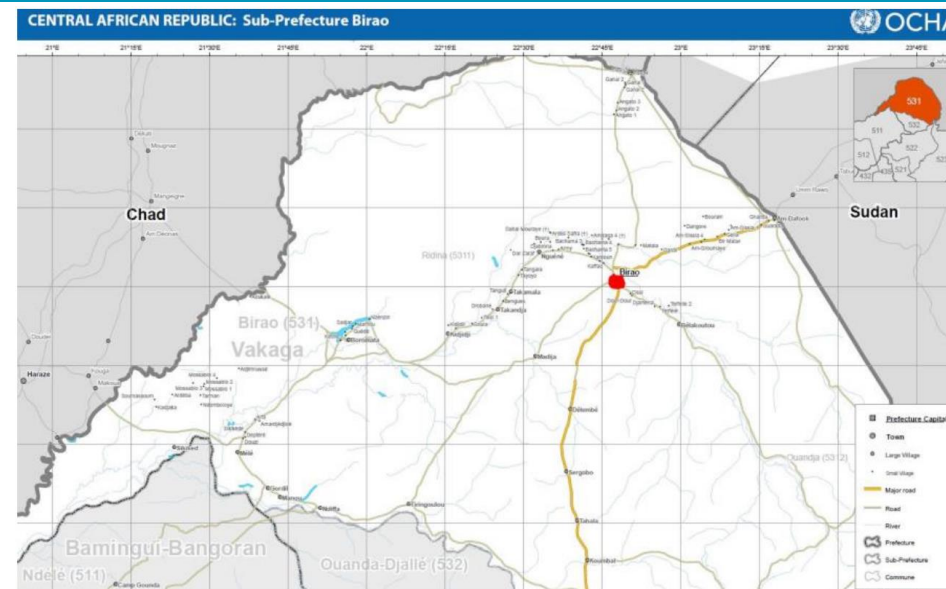
CAR Displacement

Starting on 1 September, armed clashes broke out between the Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (MLCJ) and the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) near Birao, killing approximately 20 people and wounding several dozen more. The recent spike in violence has led to the displacement of at least 13,000 people in the vicinity of Birao, most of whom have sought shelter at the MINUSCA base in the area. At present, very little precise information is available regarding the conditions of the displaced population, though severe shelter, food, protection, and health needs can be anticipated.

NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



IMPACT



OCHA 11/09/2019

Anticipated scope and scale

Birao, Vakaga prefecture, is the area most directly affected by violence. So far, approximately 20 people have been killed in fighting between rival militia groups, though there is a significant risk that the number of fatalities could increase if clashes continue. Approximately 13,000 people are currently displaced in Birao, with more expected to leave their homes in the coming days. It can be anticipated that humanitarian needs will increase in line with expanding population of displaced people, though little precise information is currently available.

Key priorities



+13,000
people displaced



Food security
likely to deteriorate



+6,000 children
with specific protection needs

Humanitarian constraints



Most roads to Birao have been blocked as a result of heavy rainfall during the annual rainy season, which has limited access. If violence between the MLCJ and FPRC continues, the resulting insecurity may generate further constraints on the delivery of assistance.

Limitations

Little information is available about specific humanitarian needs and preliminary assessments are still ongoing. The humanitarian context in Birao is evolving rapidly, making it difficult to verify the accuracy of information.

Crisis impact

On 1 September, fighting broke out between two rival militia groups, the FPRC (who mostly belong to the Rounga ethnic group) and the MLCJ (who mostly belong to the Kara ethnic group), near Birao, Vakaga prefecture. The violence reportedly escalated when the son of a local community leader, an ethnic Kara, was killed by FPRC fighters, triggering clashes with the MLCJ (ACLED 03/09/2019).

Clashes between the FPRC and MLCJ have reportedly led to at least 20 fatalities including one civilian (VOA 11/09/2019). On 3 September, it was reported that approximately 1,000 IDPs were sheltering in the compound of the CAR peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA) (ECHO 03/09/2019). Since then, the number of displaced people at the compound site has increased to more than 12,000. In total, approximately 13,000 people have reportedly been displaced, with more people continuing to leave their homes daily (UN 11/09/2019; VOA 11/09/2019).

Northern CAR has long been a hotspot for insecurity, which has contributed to a high level of humanitarian needs even before the effects of the recent violence and displacement are taken into account. In Vakaga prefecture specifically, previous fighting between the FPRC and MLCJ on 14 July in Am Dafok, a village near Birao, killed approximately 20 people (Corbeau News 01/09/2019). Both groups have reportedly been reinforcing their positions in the vicinity of Birao in recent days, which suggests that the risk of further violence is significant (Corbeau News 08/09/2019). Shelter, protection, food, and health needs have likely increased significantly since the fighting escalated though very little verifiable information is currently available and assessments are ongoing.

Shelter: Fighting between the FPRC and MLCJ has led to the destruction of houses and the displacement of at least 13,000 people (UN 11/09/2019; RFI 03/09/2019). Given that most displaced people are being housed in the local MINUSCA base, there is a significant risk of overcrowding and shelter needs will likely be a priority for response efforts. As of early August, the total population of IDPs in Vakaga prefecture was approximately 1,500 (OCHA 08/08/2019).

Food: The latest IPC analysis for CAR indicates that approximately 18,000 people in Vakaga prefecture (30% of the total population) are facing Crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 21/06/2019). This figure has likely increased as a result of the recent violence between the FPRC and MLCJ in the vicinity of Birao and corresponding displacement of civilians in the area. Assessments to determine the precise level of food insecurity among the displaced population are ongoing (OCHA 11/09/2019).

Protection: Some of the reported fatalities from the recent clashes have been civilians, which raises protection concerns. Approximately 6,000 children have been identified as particularly vulnerable and having specific protection needs (OCHA 11/09/2019).

Health: Access to health services was limited in Birao even before the effects of the recent violence and displacement are taken into account. Assessments conducted in the town in 2018 found that access was limited by underdeveloped health infrastructure and a significant shortage of supplies and qualified medical personnel (UNDP 20/08/2018). IDP sites in the vicinity of Birao such as the local MINUSCA compound may face an elevated risk of a disease outbreak as a result of the rapid influx of new arrivals and likely overcrowding.

Vulnerable groups affected

Children represent a particularly vulnerable group in the context of the recent clashes in Birao. Both the FPRC and MLCJ have been accused in the past of using child soldiers in their military operations (Pulitzer Center 21/08/2018; Child Soldiers International 30/04/2016).

Humanitarian and operational constraints

Birao is located in a remote part of CAR where humanitarian access is generally very limited. Most roads to and from Birao have been blocked following heavy rainfall since the beginning of the rainy season (OCHA 11/09/2019). Access may be further constrained if significant fighting continues between the FPRC and MLCJ, which will make it more challenging for humanitarian actors to deliver assistance to Birao and adjacent communities. Violence targeting humanitarian aid workers remains a persistent problem across CAR, with more than 100 attacks recorded nationwide since the start of 2019 (Africa News 05/08/2019).

Aggravating factors

Rainy Season

Since the end of August, Vakaga prefecture and other parts of northern CAR have experienced above average levels of rainfall, which has made the area more vulnerable to flooding (FEWS NET 31/08/2019). In addition to blocking road access, there is a risk that significant heavy rains may also inflict damage to makeshift shelters for the displaced population in the area. The rainy season in CAR typically lasts from May through October; further rain in the coming weeks can be expected.

Political Instability

Years of conflict have eroded the government's capacity to enforce security and provide essential services to the population of CAR. Despite hopes that CAR's 2015-16 elections would mark a turning point in the conflict, violence between rival armed groups has remained pervasive and the national government continues to have little authority and control outside of Bangui. As a result, large parts of the country remain heavily dependent

on humanitarian assistance and vulnerable to further escalations of violence (OCHA 22/02/2019).

Contextual information

Conflict Overview

CAR experienced a significant spike in violence in 2013 when a coalition of militias known as the Seleka launched a military offensive against the government. After capturing many towns including Bangui, the Seleka were successful in forcing President Francois Bozizé from power. Fighting between the Seleka and the anti-Balaka, a rival militia coalition, continued throughout much of the country, leading to widespread displacement and an escalation of humanitarian needs that has persisted through the present.

Since the onset of the conflict in CAR, fighting has often taken place along religious and ethnic lines, with Seleka-aligned groups claiming to represent the interests of CAR's Muslim population, and anti-Balaka groups claiming to represent CAR's Christian majority (ICG 21/09/2019). Constantly shifting alliances, however, have periodically brought ex-Seleka and anti-Balaka forces together and moreover caused groups that were former allies to come into conflict. The recent clashes in Birao, for example have pitted the FPRC and MLCJ, which were both formerly Seleka-aligned groups, against one another.

Many attempts have been made since the onset of the conflict in CAR to bring about a cessation of hostilities between opposing groups but with limited success. Most recently, a ceasefire was brokered in February 2019 between the government and 14 militias (The Telegraph 04/02/2019). Despite the agreement being in place, numerous ceasefire violations have been reported, including significant violence against civilians (UN 17/06/2019). CAR has hosted a multidimensional integrated stabilization mission (MINUSCA) since 2014, the mandate of which is to support the peace process, facilitate humanitarian assistance, and support justice and rule of law, among other tasks.

Relevant stakeholders

FPRC: The Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) is a CAR-based militia group that largely consists of ex-Seleka forces that regrouped after the Seleka were formally disbanded in 2014. The group is led by Noureddine Adam, who was instrumental in the 2013 Seleka efforts to topple the government of Francois Bozizé (RFI 03/09/2019). The FPRC was notably one of the signatories of the February 2019 peace deal (AFP 05/09/2019).

MLCJ: The Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (MLCJ) is a militia whose founding dates to 2008, when the group split from the UFDR, another militia group. Initially, the MLCJ was aligned with the Seleka coalition, but shifting alliances have more

recently brought the group into conflict with the FPRC and other Seleka-aligned militias. Like the FPRC, the MLCJ was one of the parties to the February 2019 peace deal (AFP 05/09/2019).

Key characteristics

- **Demographic profile:** The total population of CAR is approximately 4.7 million and the population of Vakaga prefecture is 63,000. Overall life expectancy at birth is 52.17 years (World Bank 2017).
- **Food security figures:** Nationwide 1.81 million people in CAR are facing severe food insecurity (IPC 3 and higher), which corresponds to approximately 41% of the population. In Vakaga prefecture, 18,000 people are severely food insecure (30% of the total population) (IPC 20/06/2019; IPC 21/06/2019).
- **Nutrition levels:** The prevalence of chronic malnutrition (stunting) in under-5 children exceeds the emergency threshold (40%) in seven out of 16 prefectures in CAR, including Bangui (UNICEF 17/02/2015).
- **Health statistics:** Infant mortality in CAR is 121 per 1,000 live births. Maternal mortality is 890 per 100,000 live births (UNICEF 2017; ALIMA 21/07/2017).
- **WASH statistics:** Only half of CAR's population has access to drinkable water and more than 34% practice open-air defecation. (OCHA 01/11/2018)
- **Literacy levels:** At the national level, 56% of adults in CAR are literate (UNICEF 2012).

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

The government has limited capacity to respond to developments in Birao. Local media reports have suggested that ODESCA, a local NGO, has begun constructing latrines and water access points in conjunction with ACTED (Corbeau News 09/09/2019).

International response capacity

At least 12,000 IDPs are being hosted at the MINUSCA base located close to Birao (OCHA 11/09/2019). Little information is available concerning what sort of assistance the IDPs are receiving on the compound, and the extent to which needs are being met. A variety of international NGOs and UN agencies including UNICEF, WFP, IMC, Triangle, and ACTED have mobilised to provide humanitarian assistance to the conflict-affected population in Birao (OCHA 11/09/2019).

Information gaps and needs

Relatively little precise information is available about the recent clashes between FPRC and MLCJ and their humanitarian impact. Information availability may improve in the coming days as the results of assessments are finalised. Some of the most important information gaps and needs include:

- The number of people in need of assistance.
- Sectoral breakdown of needs.
- The number of people who have been displaced by violence.
- Information about the conditions of displaced people residing in the MINUSCA compound.

Lessons learned

Both the FPRC and MLCJ were parties to the February 2019 peace agreement in CAR. The persistence of clashes on a significant scale in Birao demonstrates the fragility of the agreement. Ensuring that the peace agreement is respected at both the national and local levels will have an important bearing on the overall humanitarian situation in CAR.