



Security Council

Distr.: General
15 October 2021

Original: English

Children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic and covers the period from July 2019 to June 2021.

The report addresses the effect of the cycles of violence on children in the country, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations committed against children and contains information, where available, on the perpetrators. The progress made by parties to the conflict in terms of dialogue, action plans and other child protection commitments is also outlined. The report provides a series of recommendations addressed to all parties to the conflict aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in the Central African Republic.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the fifth report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict in the Central African Republic and covers the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2021. The report provides an overview of political and security developments in the Central African Republic, describes trends and patterns of grave violations against children since the previous report ([S/2019/852](#)) and presents progress and challenges in improving the situation of children since the adoption of the conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in June 2020 ([S/AC.51/2020/3](#)). Perpetrators of grave violations are, where possible, identified in the present report. In the annexes to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)), the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC), the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) and the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) as part of the former Séléka coalition are listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and sexual violence, and attacks against schools and hospitals among the parties that have put in place measures to improve the protection of children. The local defence militias known as anti-balaka are listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and rape and sexual violence among the parties that have not put in place measures to improve the protection of children. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and sexual violence, and abduction among the parties that have not put in place measures to improve the protection of children.

2. The violations outlined in the present report were verified by the country task Force on monitoring and reporting, co-chaired by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Grave violations against children were committed mostly by armed groups. Government forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel also perpetrated violations, particularly in the first half of 2021. The monitoring and reporting of violations were hampered by security and logistical constraints that limited access throughout the reporting period. The spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and related restrictions, the electoral and post-electoral violence at the end of 2020 and in the first half of 2021 and outages of communication networks accompanied by the use of explosive ordnance also negatively affected the ability of the country task force to monitor and report on grave violations. The information presented in the report therefore does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in the country.

II. Overview of the political situation

3. Despite the signing of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic on 6 February 2019, signatories, including national security forces and armed groups, continued to commit grave violations against children. The Political Agreement monitoring mechanisms at the local level, established in the first semester of 2019, effectively supported dialogue and local conflict prevention and resolution. However, at the national level, the mechanisms experienced challenges that prevented the holding of regular sessions. The fragile security situation was compounded by the weak presence of State authority in the prefectures, mostly owing to the lack of financial resources, capacity and adequate infrastructures, poor communication infrastructures and security threats. Those challenges favoured conditions for armed groups to maintain and expand their control

over large areas of the country and pursue illegal activities during the second half of 2019.

4. Conflict between armed groups continued to threaten the protection of civilians, including children. In the second half of 2019, Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran prefectures were particularly affected by the conflict. For example, repeated ethnic clashes between FPRC (Runga faction) and the Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (MLCJ/Kara faction) in Vakaga prefecture resulted in civilian casualties, including a high number of children killed and 24,000 displaced civilians during August and September 2019. Repeated inter-ethnic clashes between FPRC Runga/Sara and FPRC Gula/Kara continued in Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran prefectures through the first half of 2020, resulting in child and adult civilian casualties and more than 15,000 people displaced according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Following dialogue efforts, the Gula and Runga factions of FPRC signed a non-aggression pact in August 2020, and a subsequent reconciliation pact to end the violence was adopted in November 2020, calming tensions. Clashes also occurred in Bangui. Fighting between armed traders and members of the Bangui PK5 group “YOU” in late December 2019 led to several people being killed and injured, including children.

5. Throughout 2020, armed groups expanded their presence outside their areas of usual control for economic reasons, collecting contributions not prescribed by law from cattle herders and deploying into locations where new mining sites had been discovered. FPRC, MPC and UPC expanded from their strongholds in the centre and east to new mining sites in Ouham prefecture in the north-west, UPC having already expanded its presence to Bamouti, Haut-Mbomou prefecture, in 2019 for other economic activities. Meanwhile, the Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (3R) expanded its influence outside its stronghold of Kouï, Ouham-Pendé prefecture. Those movements enabled armed groups to position themselves politically by building alliances with other armed groups ahead of the presidential and legislative elections of December 2020.

6. In June 2020, 3R withdrew from the Political Agreement monitoring mechanisms and from the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, shifting its focus on strengthening its ranks. Consequently, on 15 June, MINUSCA, in coordination with the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic, launched an operation to contain 3R to its original stronghold and political dialogue was conducted to enable the armed group to rejoin the peace process. During that time, 3R continued to commit serious violations against the civilian population and was suspected of having used landmines, presenting a new threat to the population, including to children (see [S/2020/994](#)).

7. Starting in July 2020, children abducted by an LRA splinter group under the command of “Doctor Achaye” (LRA-Achaye) in Haut-Mbomou prefecture began to escape from the group, creating a tenuous situation for surrounding communities given that LRA-Achaye commanders actively pursued the escapees and asked the communities to return the children. Local authorities and peace committees initiated a dialogue with LRA-Achaye with the aim of protecting the communities surrounding the group’s base and building trust with the group. During the reporting period, the group continued to hold abducted children, force abducted girls into marriage with commanders and submit the children to serious punishments at the base, including killings.

8. Towards the end of 2020, the political context was dominated by developments related to the presidential and legislative elections of 27 December. Tensions escalated following the decision of 3 December of the Constitutional Court to invalidate 5 of the 22 presidential candidates, including the former president of the

Central African Republic, François Bozizé. On 15 December, representatives of six armed groups, namely, anti-balaka Mokom and Ngaïssona factions, 3R, an FPRC faction, MPC and UPC, signed a joint statement denouncing the Political Agreement and criticizing the Government's shortcomings in advancing the peace process. On 17 December, they announced the formation of the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC). CPC-aligned armed groups launched simultaneous, coordinated attacks from three main axes towards Bangui and across the country between 18 and 23 December. CPC further disrupted movements on the main supply route connecting Bangui to the Cameroon border and temporarily cut off power to Bangui. Grave violations against children were committed by CPC, including the targeting of humanitarians for their assets. National defence and security forces started to abandon their posts in many locations when faced with the growing aggression by CPC. In that context, MINUSCA was strengthened under inter-mission cooperation arrangements with units from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. Additional security support for the national defence and security forces was deployed at the end of December 2020 at the request of the Government under bilateral agreements with other Member States.

9. On 27 December, the first round of the presidential and legislative elections took place in a context of heightened violence. Grave violations were committed, including attacks by CPC elements on 14 schools used as voting centres. President Touadéra was declared re-elected. On 18 January 2021, he addressed the nation and expressed his willingness to enter into dialogue and engage with all stakeholders to the peace process, albeit excluding armed groups associated with CPC. On 30 March, President Touadéra was sworn into office and reiterated his commitment to the Political Agreement. From 15 December 2020 until the end of June 2021, 144 civilians were confirmed to have been killed by parties to the conflict¹ and 213,000 civilians had been displaced as of the end of May 2021 as a result of the electoral and post-electoral crisis.²

10. On 31 December 2020, following the establishment of CPC, President Touadéra signed decrees rescinding the appointments of Maxime Mokom of anti-balaka, Bi Sidi Souleymane (alias Sidiki) of 3R, Mahamat Hamat Alhisene (alias Al-Khatim) of MPC and Ali Darassa of UPC, all involved in CPC. Mokom had been the Minister of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reinsertion and Repatriation, while the others had been advisers to the Prime Minister for the Unités spéciales mixtes de sécurités. On 19 February 2021, the President rescinded the appointment of an additional 12 armed groups' representatives to the Government, all of whom were from armed groups that had joined the CPC.

11. Insecurity and political tensions continued in 2021. On 13 January, CPC launched coordinated attacks on Bangui resulting in a high number of CPC deaths, including an undetermined number of children associated with the Coalition. MINUSCA, the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel successfully repelled CPC and, subsequently, the Armed Forces, supported by bilaterally deployed and other security personnel, launched a series of counter-offensive military operations to dislodge CPC from localities that it had recently occupied and regain control over strategic locations.

12. Following the national curfew declared on 7 January, a state of emergency was introduced by the Government for 15 days on 21 January and renewed for six months on 5 February. It was verified that civil liberties had been restricted and that the

¹ Public report by the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 2021.

² See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87596>.

situation had given way to reports of excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and summary executions, including of children, by government forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. That created a climate of fear among the population, exacerbating pre-existing distrust of the national defence forces and the authorities. The death of “General” Abbas Sidiki was announced by 3R on 2 April. Despite 3R, UPC and MPC having terminated their association with CPC on 4 and 5 April and 21 June, respectively, they remained active and continued to commit violations. UPC and 3R elements attacked the Armed Forces over the first half of 2021, resulting in counter-offensives by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. Muslim and Fulani civilians, including children, suspected of supporting CPC on grounds of religion and ethnicity were particularly targeted by the operations of the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel in response to CPC attacks, resulting in those communities seeking refuge in the bush. Schools were systematically used for military purposes accompanied by grave violations against children.

13. Since April 2021, there has been a surge in the number and gravity of violations of the status-of-forces agreement committed by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. Those violations negatively affected the Mission’s ability to fulfil its mandate, including the protection of civilians. Furthermore, throughout the reporting period, humanitarian organizations were deeply affected by insecurity, clashes and violent activities by all parties to the conflict directly targeting humanitarian personnel and assets and undermining access to persons in need of assistance. Offices were pillaged, leading some organizations to temporarily suspend their activities. In addition, the use of explosive ordinance by parties to the conflict, particularly in Sector West, including by 3R in July 2020 in Nana-Mambéré prefecture, prevented the humanitarian community from delivering vital assistance to communities in need. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as at 30 June 2021, there were 2.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and more than 717,000 internally displaced in the country.³

14. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 exacerbated the precarious protection environment for children. Schools were closed to prevent the spread of the virus, raising concerns about a potential increase in children’s vulnerability to violations, notably recruitment and use, and sexual violence. The country task force and the Government broadcast radio messages to sensitize the population on child protection concerns and prevent the exposure of children to COVID-19. Following the appeal on 23 March 2020 by the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire, UPC issued a statement calling for unified efforts to fight the pandemic, but overall armed groups did not adhere to the appeal. Child protection activities have been deeply affected since the start of the pandemic. Many activities relating to the “Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict” campaign, including training events and awareness-raising, were temporarily suspended, as was travel between Bangui and the regions.

III. Grave violations against children

15. Between July 2019 and June 2021, the country task force verified 1,663 grave violations against 1,280 children (727 boys and 553 girls), namely, recruitment and use (845), killing and maiming (155), rape and other forms of sexual violence (249), abduction (116), attacks against schools and hospitals (72) and denial of humanitarian access (226). A total of 64 children were affected by more than one violation. Furthermore, the country task force late-verified 261 grave violations that had

³ See <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/car/>.

occurred in previous periods: recruitment and use (253), killing (4) and sexual violence (4) against 261 children (187 boys and 74 girls).

16. Compared with the previous report (S/2019/852), which covered a three-and-a-half-year period from January 2016 to June 2019, there was an overall increase in the number of verified grave violations. The recruitment and use of children was the most prominent violation and the one that increased the most, peaking in 2020. Sexual violence and denial of humanitarian access increased slightly, while abductions, killing and maiming, and attacks on schools and hospitals decreased overall. Since the end of 2020, attacks on schools and hospitals have been on the rise again. The vast majority of grave violations were committed by armed groups (82 per cent) and 5 per cent by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. The remaining 13 per cent could not be attributed to a specific party to the conflict.

A. Recruitment and use

17. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 845 children (598 boys and 247 girls), aged between 7 and 17 years, including 292 below the age of 15. The 845 children were recruited between 2012 and 2020 and were used during the reporting period. A total of 183 cases were verified in the second half of 2019, 584 in 2020 and 78 in the first half of 2021. The main perpetrators were ex-Séléka factions (451), namely, FPRC (408), MPC (20), UPC (19), UPC/MPC and the Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique (RPRC) (2 each). Other perpetrators were anti-balaka (132), 3R (92), LRA-Achaye (53), MLCJ (46), CPC: 3R/anti-balaka (33), the PK5 group “YOU” (11), bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (10), unidentified CPC (4), unidentified armed individuals (2) and Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (1). Ten additional children were used at checkpoints manned by the Forces de sécurité intérieure (FSI) (4), Armed Forces/FSI (3) and the Armed Forces (3). Violations occurred in Vakaga (391), Haute-Kotto (154), Ouham-Pendé (93), Haut-Mbomou (58), Nana-Mambéré (46), Nana-Grébizi (36), Ouaka (23), Ouham (18), Bangui (11), Ombella M’Poko (8), Mbomou (4) and Basse-Kotto (3) prefectures. In addition, the country task force late-verified the recruitment and use of 253 children (185 boys and 68 girls) in previous years by anti-balaka (247), FPRC (5) and RPRC (1).

18. Of the total, 35 girls were used for sexual purposes, 232 children were used as combatants and the remaining 578 children were used in support roles such as bodyguards, manning checkpoints, spies, messengers, porters and carrying out domestic tasks. Some children received military training. Most children (653) were released from armed groups following dialogue by the country task force. Armed groups that had signed action plans released the highest number of children, namely, FPRC (394) and MPC (19). Other children were released from anti-balaka (111), 3R (83) and MLCJ (46). The remaining 192 children either escaped or continued to be used to perform tasks such as manning checkpoints, fetching water and running errands while living in their communities.

19. There was a considerable increase in the number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children between the second half of 2019 (183) and 2020 (584). The increase was due to the high number of children separated from armed groups as a result of the country task force’s advocacy with parties to the conflict. The children were recruited between 2012 and 2020, but cases were verified only upon their separation from the groups in 2020. Recruitment and use remained the most prominent grave violation in 2020, representing 65 per cent of the total number of violations. During the first half of 2021, the number of cases stood at 78. For example, on 16 February, the country task force verified the recruitment of 30 Fulani boys aged

between 14 and 16 years by CPC (3R/anti-balaka). The boys were trained in handling weapons at a 3R training base in Nana-Mambéré prefecture.

20. Most children reported that they had joined the armed groups to protect their communities from attacks by rival armed groups or for revenge. Poverty was also a driving force. For example, in April 2020, during the verification of 126 children associated with FPRC and MLCJ in Vakaga prefecture, only 10 children reported having been forcefully recruited through abduction. In addition, seven children tried to join LRA-Achaye in April 2021 out of poverty but were rejected by the armed group's leader. Armed groups also recruited children to strengthen their ranks as they engaged in armed confrontations and expanded their control over territory.

Detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups

21. During the reporting period, 10 boys were arrested and detained by the gendarmerie for their alleged association with armed groups. Five of the boys, as well as an additional six children detained prior to the reporting period, were released and benefited from reintegration support. The children were released following joint advocacy by the country task force, the Minister Adviser to the President on Child Protection and the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Family and Protection of Children with the judicial authorities. Advocacy continued for the release of 12 children in detention accused of association with armed groups, including 7 who had been arrested and detained prior to the reporting period.

B. Killing and maiming

22. The country task force verified the killing (83) and maiming (72) of 155 children (96 boys and 59 girls), some as young as three months old, in the second half of 2019 (59), 2020 (49) and in the first half of 2021 (47). The number of child casualties decreased compared with the previous reporting period (324) but remained high. In addition, the country task force late-verified the killing of four children (2 boys and 2 girls) in previous reporting periods.

23. Most child casualties (74) were attributed to unidentified perpetrators as they occurred during crossfire (63) and in incidents involving explosive remnants of war (11). The crossfire took place between unidentified armed elements (21), anti-balaka and UPC (9), joint Armed Forces/FSI and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel against UPC (9), FPRC and MLCJ (8), the Armed Forces and an unidentified self-defence group in Bangui (3), armed traders and the PK5 group "YOU" (3), the Armed Forces and UPC (2), anti-balaka and FPRC (2), joint Armed Forces, bilaterally deployed and other security personnel and MINUSCA against unidentified CPC (2), Armed Forces and unidentified CPC (1), MINUSCA and unidentified CPC (1), FPRC and Fulani herders (1) and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel and MPC (1). Other perpetrators were ex-Séléka factions (22) (FPRC and UPC (11 each)), followed by bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (14), MLCJ (10), anti-balaka (10), 3R (7), CPC factions (7) (3R (4), 3R/anti-balaka (2) and unidentified CPC (1)), Armed Forces (5), the PK5 group "YOU" (4), Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (1) and FDPC (1). Ouaka was the most affected prefecture (35), followed by Vakaga (19), Nana-Mambéré (18), Bangui (15), Ombella M'Poko (14), Lobaye (11), Haute-Kotto (10), Nana-Grébizi (8), Bamingui-Bangoran (7), Mbomou (4), Basse-Kotto, Ouham-Pendé and Kemo (3 each), Ouham (2) and Lim-Pendé, Mambéré-Kadéï and Ouham-Fafa (1 each). In addition, the country task force late-verified the killing of four children (2 boys and 2 girls) by UPC in Ndjolinda village, Ouaka prefecture, on 13 March 2017.

24. In the second half of 2019, there were more verified violations of killing and maiming (59) compared with the entire year of 2020 (49), which can be explained by armed clashes between FPRC and MLCJ in Birao (Vakaga prefecture), UPC and anti-balaka in Bangao, Lihoto and Ngouyali (Ouaka prefecture) and traders and members of the PK5 group “YOU” in Bangui. During the first half of 2021, 47 children, some as young as three months old, were killed or maimed owing to the post-electoral violence and counter-offensives against armed groups led by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel.

25. Most of the children were killed or maimed by shootings and stray bullets during crossfire (137), explosive remnants of war (11) and arson (7). For example, seven children (4 boys and 3 girls) were killed during clashes between anti-balaka and UPC in Bangao, Ouaka prefecture, between 27 and 30 September 2019. On 5 August 2019, four children (3 boys and 1 girl) were injured by an explosive remnant of war in the Bossangoa neighbourhood of Bouar, Nana-Mambéré prefecture. One of the victims sustained serious injuries. The use of a drone in January 2021 by bilaterally deployed and other security personnel also resulted in six children being killed (4 boys and 2 girls) and another five children (4 boys and 1 girl) being maimed by shrapnel after the drone exploded in a market in Lobaye prefecture. Children were also deliberately killed. Three girls accused of practising witchcraft were burned alive by anti-balaka elements in a village in Kemo prefecture on 8 February 2020. In April 2021, in Ouaka prefecture, a 12-year-old boy was accused by the Armed Forces of being associated with UPC and taken to his home, which was searched and subsequently torched with the boy inside. The boy was killed.

26. Retaliatory attacks also resulted in a significant number of child casualties. For example, on the night of 29 to 30 August 2019, following the killing of the son of the Sultan-Mayor of Birao by an FPRC element in Birao, Vakaga prefecture, 12 children were killed, including four boys associated with FPRC, in clashes between MLCJ and FPRC/Runga. In September and October 2020, retaliatory clashes between anti-balaka and UPC resulted in 16 children being killed in Ouaka prefecture. Between 15 and 16 February 2021, nine children (5 boys and 4 girls) were injured in clashes between Armed Forces/FSI and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel against UPC in Ouaka prefecture.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

27. The country task force verified rape and other forms of sexual violence against 249 children, all girls, aged between 4 and 17 years. Cases of sexual violence steadily increased throughout the reporting period, with 41 verified violations during the second half of 2019, 114 in 2020 and 94 during the first half of 2021. Sexual violence continued to be underreported owing to fear of reprisals from parties to the conflict who live within communities, the climate of insecurity that prevailed in most of the country, a lack of access to medical assistance, stigmatization and the onset of COVID-19 and the related movement restrictions, which impeded verification work. Seventy-nine per cent of the violations were perpetrated by armed groups.

28. Ex-Séléka factions were responsible for 59 violations, namely, FPRC (24), UPC (13), unidentified ex-Séléka (11), MPC (7) and FPRC/MPC (4). Other perpetrators were CPC factions (49) (unidentified CPC (28), UPC (10), anti-balaka (5), 3R (3), FPRC (2) and MPC (1)); 3R (38); anti-balaka (28); unidentified armed individuals (31); LRA-Achaye (19); Armed Forces (13); bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (4); Séléka rénové pour la paix et la justice, FSI and Chadian National Army elements (2 each); and Révolution et justice/Sayo Branch (RJ-Sayo Branch) and the PK5 group “YOU” (1 each). Violations occurred in the prefectures of Ouham-Pendé (39), Nana-Grébizi (36), Ouaka and Haut-Mbomou (26 each), Nana-Mambéré

(25), Mbomou (24), Haute-Kotto (21), Kemo (16), Ouham and Ombella M’Poko (9 each), Bamingui-Bangoran (6), Vakaga and Lim-Pendé (4 each), Bangui (2), Basse-Kotto and Lobaye (1 each). In addition, the country task force late-verified the rape of four girls, which had occurred during the previous reporting period and was attributed respectively to UPC, MPC, FPRC and anti-balaka in Ouaka, Ouham, Haute-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures.

29. Although most rapes were committed in communities with an increased presence of armed groups in towns and villages, 24 girls were raped in the context of abduction and recruitment and use. For example, 13 girls were raped during their association with LRA-Achaye. Also, on 13 November 2019, a 16-year-old girl was abducted in a village in Haut-Mbomou prefecture by UPC elements and taken to their base, where she was raped.

30. Twenty per cent of the victims (51) were gang-raped by 3R (19), unidentified CPC (12), unidentified armed individuals (7), FPRC (5), UPC and anti-balaka (3 each) and unidentified ex-Séléka and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (1 each). Thirty-nine of the gang rapes occurred between the last quarter of 2020 and the first half of 2021 when the security situation deteriorated owing to the electoral and post-electoral violence and the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel military operations against CPC. For example, in February 2021, a 17-year-old girl was gang-raped by four 3R elements in a village in Ouham-Pendé prefecture.

31. Sexual exploitation and abuse of children by peacekeepers continued to be a concern in the Central African Republic. Information on allegations received, as well as on measures taken by the United Nations or by Member States, is available online.⁴

D. Attacks against schools and hospitals

32. The country task force verified 72 incidents of attacks against schools (41) and hospitals (31) during the period under review, which represents a decrease compared with the previous reporting period (138). Nevertheless, the attacks further weakened the already fragile health-care and education systems.

Attacks against schools, including protected persons in relation to schools

33. Forty-one attacks against schools, including protected persons in relation to schools, were verified in 2020 (23) and in the first half of 2021 (18), while none were verified in the second half of 2019. Violations were attributed to unidentified CPC (18), unidentified armed individuals (4), 3R, anti-balaka, UPC and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (3 each), CPC/UPC and MPC (2 each) and CPC/FPRC, FPRC and Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (1 each). Nana-Mambéré was the most affected prefecture (9), followed by Ouaka (7), Ouham and Mambéré-Kadéï (6 each), Basse-Kotto (4), Mbomou (3), Haute-Kotto (2) and Ouham-Fafa, Bamingui-Bangoran, Ouham-Pendé and Ombella M’Poko (1 each).

34. Most incidents occurred in December 2020 (17) and the first half of 2021 (18). Between July 2019 and November 2020, six incidents of attacks against schools were verified, which can be explained by a relatively calm security situation prevailing during that period. The sharp increase in violations towards the end of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 was due to targeted attacks against schools used as voting centres perpetrated by CPC to disrupt the elections of 27 December 2020. The attacks resulted in the destruction of school materials in 18 schools as well as looting (14), threats against school personnel and students (8) and the burning of a school building (1).

⁴ <https://conduct.unmissions.org>.

Since December 2020, such attacks have deprived at least 15,300 children of their fundamental right to education. For instance, on 27 December 2020, 14 schools used as voting centres in Basse-Kotto, Nana-Mambéré and Mambéré-Kadéï (4 each) and Haute-Kotto and Bamingui-Bangoran (1 each) were pillaged by CPC in an attempt to stop the elections from taking place.

Military use of schools

35. During the reporting period, 51 cases of military use of schools were verified and attributed to the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (19), UPC (12), bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (11), the Armed Forces (3), 3R and unidentified armed individuals (2 each) and FPRC/MPC and unidentified CPC (1 each). At least 16,200 children were deprived of their right to education as a result. The Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel used schools mostly during military operations as their base, thereby depriving children enrolled at those schools from attending classes or forcing children to enrol in different schools. For example, after the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel used two schools in Nana-Mambéré prefecture on 8 February 2021, students were forced to attend another school further away from their area. Eleven schools were vacated following advocacy by the country task force. Also, eight schools previously used by UPC in Ouaka prefecture, some as far back as 2016, were vacated following the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel military operations. By the end of June 2021, 13 schools continued to be used by bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (8), joint Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (3), Armed Forces (1) and UPC (1).

Attacks on hospitals and protected persons in relation to hospitals

36. A total of 31 attacks against hospitals, including against protected persons in relation to hospitals, were verified and attributed to bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (8), unidentified armed elements (6), unidentified CPC (5), UPC (4), anti-balaka (3), Armed Forces (2) and FPRC, unidentified ex-Séléka and 3R (1 each). They occurred in Mbomou (5), Nana-Grébizi and Lobaye (4 each), Ouaka, Ouham and Ouham-Pendé (3 each), Haute-Kotto and Nana-Mambéré (2 each) and Bangui, Vakaga, Ouham-Fafa and Haut-Mbomou prefectures (1 each). Incidents involved looting (25), threats against and injuring of medical personnel and patients (5) and the burning of a health-care centre (1). For example, bilaterally deployed and other security personnel pillaged four health-care facilities in Lobaye prefecture, stealing beds and mattresses, and destroyed the doors to two freezers used to store medication. Also, on 10 August 2020, two unidentified armed elements broke into the health-care centre in Sango 2 village, Nana-Grébizi prefecture, and forced the centre's medical attendant to transport the stolen items (solar panel and batteries) before killing him. Parties to the conflict looted medical supplies and equipment from health-care facilities as a means of sustenance during ongoing clashes.

37. Attacks against hospitals gradually increased throughout the reporting period from 3 in the second half of 2019 to 7 in 2020 and 21 in the first half of 2021. This upward trend during the fourth quarter of 2020 and the first half of 2021 is a result of the post-electoral crisis and counter-offensive by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. For example, three medical personnel and a child were injured when 3R elements shot at them while they were transporting the child and other patients to a health-care facility. In another incident, elements of the Armed Forces intercepted an international non-governmental organization (NGO) transporting patients, forcing one of the patients, a girl, to leave the vehicle on suspicion that she was associated with CPC.

Military use of hospitals

38. Two cases of military use of hospitals were verified by the country task force during the reporting period. In 2020, a hospital was militarily used by FPRC/MPC elements in Markounda, Ouham prefecture, and later vacated. In the first half of 2021, bilaterally deployed and other security personnel used a health-care centre in Nana-Grébizi prefecture, which was later vacated.

E. Abduction

39. The country task force verified the abduction of 116 children (56 boys and 60 girls). Violations increased from 18 during the second half of 2019 to 61 in 2020 and stood at 37 during the first half of 2021. In addition, allegations of the abduction of 23 children in 2020 and 25 in the first half of 2021 were still under verification at the end of June 2021. Children were abducted for recruitment and use (57) (50 per cent), sexual purposes (29), ransom (7) and for unknown reasons (23).

40. Overall, LRA-Achaye was responsible for 48 per cent of the abductions, affecting 56 children, followed by 3R (19), ex-Séléka factions (14) (UPC (9), FPRC (4) and unidentified ex-Séléka (1)), anti-balaka (11), unidentified armed individuals (8), CPC factions (7) (unidentified CPC (5) and UPC (2)) and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (1). Haut-Mbomou was the most affected prefecture (57), followed by Nana-Mambéré (16), Ouham-Pendé (13), Ouaka (8), Ouham and Haute-Kotto (6 each), Ombella M'Poko (4), Nana-Grébizi (3), Basse-Kotto (2) and Lobaye (1).

41. An increasing number of children escaped from LRA-Achaye. Forty-seven children (21 boys and 26 girls) escaped during the second half of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. For example, between 25 December 2020 and 7 January 2021, 14 children (5 boys and 9 girls) escaped from the group's base in Haut-Mbomou prefecture. Four of the girls who escaped had been used as wives/sex slaves, resulting in the birth of four children while in captivity.

42. The increase in the number of abductions in 2020 can be explained by armed groups appearing to strengthen their ranks ahead of the elections. For example, 3R was responsible for two abductions during the last two quarters of 2019, but the group abducted 12 children in 2020.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

43. A total of 226 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified in the second half of 2019 (41), in 2020 (103) and in the first half of 2021 (82). Violations were attributed to unidentified armed individuals (83), anti-balaka (36), unidentified CPC (25), FPRC (15), FPRC/MPC (11), UPC (10) FPRC/UPC and 3R (8 each), MPC (6), bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (6), unidentified ex-Séléka and joint FPRC/UPC/anti-balaka (3 each), Armed Forces/bilaterally deployed and other security personnel and Armed Forces (2 each) and Armed Forces/FSI, MLCJ, MPC/RJ and MPC/3R (1 each). In addition, four violations were unattributed and occurred on 3 September 2019, when the offices of two NGOs and two international NGOs were looted during clashes between MLCJ and FPRC/Runga in Birao, Vakaga prefecture. Ouham was the most affected prefecture with 56 violations, followed by Nana-Grébizi (52), Mbomou (19), Bamingui-Bangoran (17), Ouham-Pendé and Nana-Mambéré (13 each), Ouaka (12), Haute-Kotto (11), Ombella M'Poko (8), Vakaga (7), Mambéré-Kadéï (6), Basse-Kotto and Haut-Mbomou (3 each), Ouham-Fafa and Lim-Pendé (2 each) and Kemo and Lobaye (1 each).

44. Incidents involved violence against humanitarian facilities and assets (204), carjacking (11), assault on humanitarian personnel (7), kidnapping (2), interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities preventing humanitarians from reaching beneficiaries and delivering aid (1) and killing of humanitarian personnel (1). For example, on 2 November 2019, MLCJ elements primarily of Kara ethnicity intercepted the water truck of an international NGO on its way to distribute water to an internally displaced persons camp inhabited by internally displaced persons of Runga ethnicity (Vakaga prefecture). They emptied the water from the tank and ordered the NGO personnel to return to their office.

45. The 41 incidents verified during the last two quarters of 2019 occurred mainly in Ouham, Vakaga, Nana-Grébizi and Haute-Kotto prefectures. Some were the result of intercommunal conflicts between FPRC/Runga and MLCJ in Am Dafok and Birao, Vakaga prefecture, on 14 July 2019 and during September 2019.

46. In 2020, unidentified armed individuals and anti-balaka were responsible for most of the 103 verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access. Nana-Grébizi and Ouham were the most affected prefectures. Violations such as robberies, carjackings and looting accounted for 94 per cent of the incidents, of which approximately 10 per cent were committed by CPC in the lead-up to the elections. For example, the premises of eight international and national NGOs, and international organizations were pillaged in Bouar, Nana-Mambéré prefecture, between 27 and 28 December 2020.

47. During the first half of 2021, 82 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified, attributed mostly to CPC groups and unidentified armed individuals. Other incidents were attributed to bilaterally deployed and other security personnel (6), Armed Forces/bilaterally deployed and other security personnel and Armed Forces (2 each) and Armed Forces/FSI (1). For instance, on 6 February, a humanitarian staff member was physically assaulted by elements of the Armed Forces at a checkpoint for refusing to transport a civilian passenger onboard the United Nations agency's vehicle. In March, bilaterally deployed and other security personnel threatened humanitarian personnel at an airfield in Mambéré-Kadéï prefecture to search an aircraft and its contents. Ouham, Mbomou and Nana-Grébizi were the most affected prefectures.

IV. Release of children and the programmatic response

48. Direct engagement by the country task force with armed groups led to the separation of 653 children (451 boys and 202 girls) in 2019 (156) and in 2020 (497). No children were released from armed groups in 2021 largely owing to insecurity, which also affected the ability of the country task force to engage with parties to the conflict to advocate for the release of children. Following the adoption by FPRC of an action plan in June 2019, 255 children were separated in November 2020 after the group provided the country task force with a list of associated children for verification.

49. The 653 children were separated from FPRC (394: 258 boys and 136 girls), anti-balaka (111: 79 boys and 32 girls), 3R (83: 81 boys and 2 girls), MLCJ (46: 18 boys and 28 girls) and MPC (19: 15 boys and 4 girls). In addition, 47 children (21 boys and 26 girls) escaped from LRA-Achaye in Haut-Mbomou prefecture during the reporting period. Furthermore, the country task force late-verified the cases of 253 children (185 boys and 68 girls) formerly associated with anti-balaka (247), FPRC (5) and RPRC (1), who had self-demobilized and were identified in Nana-Grébizi, Haute-Kotto and Ombella M'Poko prefectures in previous years.

50. Reintegration programmes were rolled out throughout much of the country, consisting of medical screening, family tracing and reunification, psychosocial assistance, and educational or vocational training. All released children entered reintegration programmes. Following vocational training, 85 per cent of the children received kits to start professional activities. Ninety per cent of those who received school materials returned to school. At the time of verification, only 11 per cent of the children were identified as being separated from their biological families and benefited from foster family support and family tracing.

51. The country task force supported efforts to include children in the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. A Minister Adviser to the President on Child Protection was appointed by presidential decree as the child protection focal point for the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme in September 2020.

V. Progress and challenges addressing grave violations against children

A. Dialogue with the Government and accountability

52. The President promulgated the Child Protection Code on 15 June 2020, following its adoption by the National Assembly on 27 February 2020. The Child Protection Code was finalized by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Family and Protection of Children, with the support of UNICEF and other members of the country task force and child protection community. The Code criminalizes all six grave violations against children and considers children associated with armed forces and groups as victims. The country task force, the Minister Adviser to the President on Child Protection and the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Family and Protection of Children participated in a round-table discussion over the radio on the roll-out of the new law.

53. Following engagement by the Minister Adviser to the President on Child Protection, 12 detained children in conflict with the law were released in May 2020 following the presidential decree of 24 April 2020 granting amnesty to detainees for specific crimes to decongest prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic. An additional 10 children accused of association with armed groups were released in October 2020.

54. In the first quarter of 2021, the country task force initiated dialogue with the Government to address the military use of schools by armed groups, the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is regularly provided with a list of schools used for military purposes to enable action by the Government. Country task force dialogue remains ongoing to address verified grave violations against children attributed to the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel.

55. The Government continued to address accountability for grave violations against children but was impeded by the absence of judicial authorities in many areas of the country owing to insecurity. During the reporting period, 850 complaints were filed with the police and gendarmerie against suspected perpetrators of crimes against children; 645 of those files were transferred to prosecutors, resulting in 110 perpetrators being sentenced to prison terms ranging from three months to 10 years. Ninety other perpetrators received suspended prison sentences of 3 to 12 months. Other files were pending before the courts at the time of writing. Regarding the fight against impunity for sexual violence against children, arrests were made for one RJ-Sayo Branch element and two anti-balaka elements during the last two quarters of 2019; one anti-balaka, one Armed Forces and one FSI element in 2020; and one anti-

balaka element in 2021. The status of the investigations was not known at the time of writing. Furthermore, the Statute for the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation was adopted on 7 April 2020 and 11 commissioners were nominated. The Commission is expected to address grave violations against children, among other crimes.

56. On 16 February 2021, the hearings in the trial of two anti-balaka leaders, Albert Yekatom and Patrice Edouard Ngaïssona, commenced before the International Criminal Court. They were arrested in 2018 for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the enlistment and use of children under the age of 15 years to participate actively in hostilities. In addition, former ex-Séléka leader Mahamat Saïd Abdel Kani, who was suspected of having committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, was surrendered to the International Criminal Court in January 2021.

57. On 4 May, the Minister of Justice published a decree to establish a special commission of inquiry to investigate allegations of serious crimes and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by national armed forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel between December 2020 and April 2021, which was extended until 30 September. The Commission's report was shared with the Government on 1 October.

58. Over the reporting period, MINUSCA screened 4,422 potential recruits for the Armed Forces, FSI and the Unités spéciales mixtes de sécurité⁵ for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including grave violations against children, to ensure that perpetrators are not admitted.

B. Action plans and dialogue with armed groups

59. The country task force continued to engage in dialogue with parties to the conflict to prevent and end grave violations against children and used, inter alia, the Child Protection Code, the Safe Schools Declaration, the 2019 Political Agreement and the ex-Séléka action plans as advocacy tools. Dialogue took place with the leadership of armed groups with a clear chain of command such as ex-Séléka factions (FPRC, MPC and UPC) and 3R. The country task force also pursued dialogue locally with self-defence groups such as anti-balaka to advocate for command orders to end and prevent grave violations. A dialogue with LRA-Achaye was also initiated.

60. In August 2019, UPC signed an action plan to end and prevent grave violations against children with a particular focus on the four grave violations for which the group is listed in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/75/873-S/2021/437), notably recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and attacks against schools and hospitals. On 21 November 2019, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict sent letters to the leadership of FPRC, MPC and UPC, requesting the swift implementation of their respective action plans, MPC and FPRC having previously adopted the plans in May 2018 and June 2019 respectively. The leader of UPC, Ali Darassa, signed a command order in December 2019 prohibiting its elements from committing grave violations. The UPC leader also appointed a child protection focal point at the group's headquarters and indicated that the latter would designate other focal points in localities under UPC control. The focal points remained to be nominated at the time of writing.

61. During 2020, the country task force faced significant challenges in pursuing dialogue with FPRC, MPC and UPC and following up on the implementation of their

⁵ Established in accordance with the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic of February 2019.

respective action plans as a result of the restriction of movement of personnel owing to the pandemic and poor communication infrastructures. That was exacerbated by the above-mentioned groups' membership in CPC and the counter-offensive military operations by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. In November 2020, the FPRC faction loyal to Abdoulaye Hissène, which remained committed to the 2019 Political Agreement, presented a list of 267 associated children as part of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. A total of 255 children were confirmed to be associated with FPRC and separated. FPRC was the first armed group to present a list of associated children as part of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. Furthermore, on 1 April 2021, lists of associated children for verification were presented by FPRC (198) and RPRC (128) following dialogue conducted by the country task force. A verification mission is being planned at the time of writing.

62. In September 2020, MINUSCA, on behalf of the country task force, initiated dialogue with LRA-Achaye following the escape of eight children from the group. MINUSCA has met with the LRA splinter group twice since the initial meeting to push for the release of associated children. Since the first meeting, 40 children (15 boys and 25 girls) have escaped from the group. Children had rarely escaped prior to this dialogue; it is presumed that associated children heard that the community was looking for them and that support, including family tracing, was available if they escaped.

C. Advocacy and mainstreaming of child protection

63. Training programmes and sensitizations were heavily impeded by the pandemic and related restrictions. Despite those challenges, MINUSCA trained 2,566 peacekeepers on child protection and delivered training of trainers for MINUSCA military and police components. Training on the protection of children during armed conflict and during the electoral process was delivered to 940 national stakeholders, including the Armed Forces (417), FSI (191), Unités spéciales mixtes de sécurité (177) and members of the Political Agreement monitoring mechanisms (155). Training and sensitizations were delivered to 29,559 community members and leaders, civil society organizations, local authorities, religious leaders and members of armed groups as part of the "Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict" campaign.

VI. Observations and recommendations

64. I am deeply concerned by the significant increase and scale of grave violations against children committed by all perpetrators, including armed groups, the Armed Forces and FSI and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. I urge all parties to the conflict to immediately halt grave violations and abide by international humanitarian law and international human rights law. I call upon the signatories to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic to uphold their commitments, including those pertaining to children, and urge the Government and parties to the conflict to work with the United Nations to develop a national strategy to prevent grave violations against children.

65. I am concerned by grave violations against children as well as military use of schools and hospitals by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. In particular, I am concerned that during counter-offensive operations, Muslim and Fulani civilians, including children, are targeted and subjected to grave violations. I welcome the establishment of a special commission of inquiry to

investigate allegations of serious crimes and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel between December 2020 and September 2021. I call upon the Government to investigate ongoing violations, to ensure that those investigations are independent and credible and to ensure that all forces operating in the Central African Republic abide by applicable law and that all violators are held accountable.

66. I welcome the promulgation of the Child Protection Code and urge the Government to allocate the funds necessary for its operationalization. I commend the commitment of national authorities in addressing grave violations against children and call upon the Government to swiftly appoint child protection focal points in the Armed Forces and establish effective measures to end and prevent grave violations against children by the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel.

67. I welcome the release from armed groups of 653 children following United Nations engagement yet remain concerned about ongoing recruitment and use of children and urge all parties to end that grave violation and to unconditionally release all associated children. I urge the Government and partners to integrate the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children into the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and enable children to access community violence reduction programmes where feasible.

68. I welcome the dialogue initiated between the United Nations and LRA-Achaye and urge the faction to end all violations and to release all abducted children. I also urge FPRC, MPC and UPC to redouble their efforts to swiftly implement their respective action plans and urge other armed groups to adopt command directives to end grave violations against children.

69. I welcome the surrender of a former ex-Séléka leader to the International Criminal Court and the commencement of the trial of two anti-balaka leaders at the Court. I further welcome the conviction by the Central African Republic authorities of 200 perpetrators of crimes against children yet remain concerned by the prevalence of impunity for perpetrators of grave violations against children and urge authorities to hold perpetrators to account. I also call upon the Special Criminal Court to fully address grave violations against children in its prosecution strategy and request the commissioners of the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation to consider child victims throughout their work and proceedings.

70. Sexual violence against children must end. In addition to prioritizing accountability, I call upon the Government to ensure that survivors have access to the required services and justice.

71. I am alarmed by the elevated incidents of denial of humanitarian access, including attacks against humanitarian actors. I urge all parties to the conflict to allow safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian actors to affected populations.

72. I am equally alarmed at the use of explosive ordnance and call upon responsible parties to immediately cease that abhorrent practice.

73. I reiterate my commitment to preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse by all United Nations personnel.

74. I urge the donor community and the Government to increase funding for sustainable and appropriate socioeconomic reintegration for children, thereby enabling access for every affected child to appropriate support.