

26 May 2015

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

IDPs face significant challenges as instability and political transition continue

Internal displacement in the Central African Republic (CAR) has been driven over decades by coups, internal armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations and natural hazards. The government has an acute lack of authority. It is unable to provide even the most basic services in the country's prefectures, and widespread impunity has allowed armed groups to proliferate. Though rich in natural resources, the country is chronically poor and ranks near to last each year on the UN Development Programme (UNDP)'s human development index.



Mireille Doungoupou and her 5 children arrived in Bambari 9 months ago fleeing violence. She lost her husband and her house in Botobadga. She is glad she is receiving assistance along with 29,000 other people displaced in Bambari. Photo: OCHA/Gemma Cortes, March 2015

As CAR moves towards the end of a political transition that will lead to the country's first democratic elections since the March 2013 coup, insecurity and displacement are still rife and the situation in many areas of the country is unstable and unpredictable. Fighting between armed groups and human rights abuses including massacres, killings, looting and gender-based violence (GBV) are daily occurrences perpetrated by all parties to the conflict.

Armed pastoralists and bandits known locally as *coupeurs de route* have also increasingly attacked civilians and forced people to flee their homes. In recent months, the insecurity and violence have centred on western and central areas of the country, where most of the new displacement reported since the beginning of 2015 has taken place.

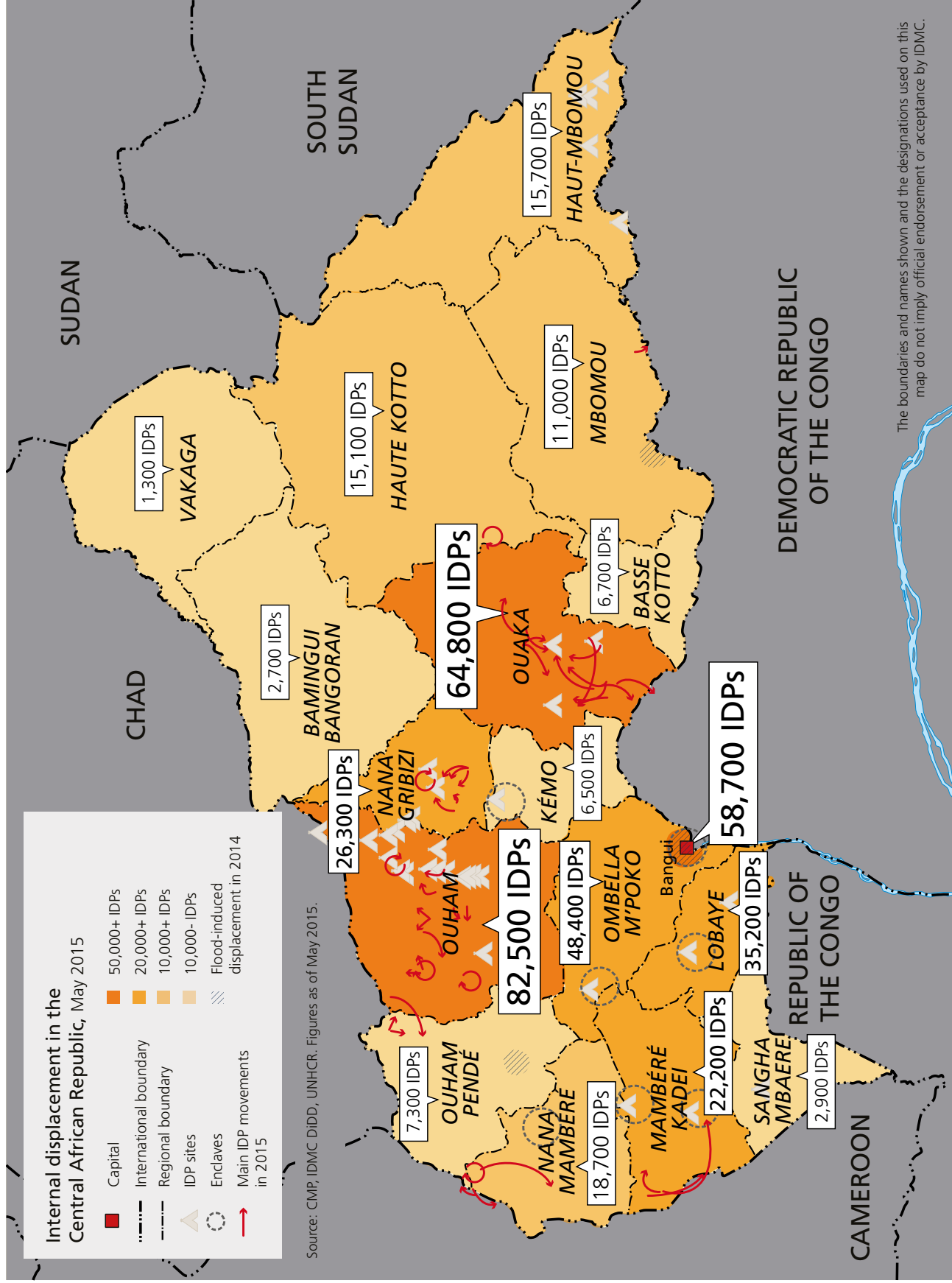
In recognition of the continuing instability affecting the country, a national forum held in the capital Bangui in May 2015 recommended delaying the elections scheduled for August. At the time of writing, however, no new date had been set.

The conflict that erupted in late 2012 has led to displacement on a vast scale, both within and beyond CAR's borders, and as of May 2015 there were an estimated 426,200 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country. There were 82,500 in Ouham prefecture, 64,800 in Ouaka, 58,700 in Bangui and 48,400 in Ombella M'Poko.

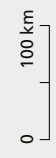
Internal displacement in the Central African Republic, May 2015

- Capital
- International boundary
- Regional boundary
- ▲ IDP sites
- Enclaves
- Main IDP movements in 2015
- 50,000+ IDPs
- 20,000+ IDPs
- 10,000+ IDPs
- 10,000- IDPs
- Flood-induced displacement in 2014

Source: CMP, IDMC DIDD, UNHCR. Figures as of May 2015.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IDMC.



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Map by: IDMC
 More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org/search?Type=Map

Mass displacements, including pre-emptive flight caused by rumours, have mainly taken place along the frontlines between Anti-balaka and former Séléka fighters in areas such as Ouaka and Ouham, where there have also been increasing reports of conflict between predominantly Christian farmers and Muslim herders. Anecdotal evidence suggests that repeated displacement has become more common, particularly outside Bangui. Humanitarians have also observed penular movements, in which IDPs shuttle regularly between their places of refuge and their homes.

CAR's IDPs face a number of serious protection concerns, including armed attacks on displacement sites and other threats to their physical security. Many have suffered severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, particularly those living in areas referred to as enclaves, which are surrounded by armed militias and mobs. Many more have lost their livelihoods, and food insecurity among IDPs and their host communities in central, north-western and southern areas of the country was at crisis level as of April 2015.

IDPs and returnees also confront a range of obstacles to their achievement of durable solutions, chief among them physical and food insecurity, lack of shelter, inability to exercise their housing and land rights, and loss of livelihoods. Housing and food are of particular concern, given the number of homes, granaries and crops that have been pillaged, burned or destroyed since the start of the 2012 crisis.

It is important that humanitarian organisations have sufficient funding to respond to IDPs' urgent needs, but as of early May 2015 the strategic response plan for the country was only 14 per cent funded. The government and its national and international partners also require funding to rebuild the country's institutions, improve governance and end widespread impunity, including through the recently established special criminal court.

Background and causes of displacement

Since independence from France in 1960, CAR has experienced a series of coups and internal armed conflicts that have triggered regular displacement over the decades. The country's endemic instability has been made worse by cross-border and regional conflict - including brutal incursions by Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army - inter-communal violence, banditry, disputes over resources between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers, and the impacts of natural hazards ([HRW](#), 7 March 2014; [HRW](#), 11 November 2010; [ICG](#), 11 June 2013).

The government has an acute lack of authority. It is unable to provide even the most basic services outside Bangui, and widespread impunity has allowed armed groups to proliferate. Though rich in natural resources, the country is chronically poor and ranks near to last each year on the UN Development Programme's human development index ([UNDP](#), n/d).

The current displacement crisis began in December 2012 with the emergence of Séléka, an alliance of predominantly Muslim armed opposition groups. It deepened in March 2013 when the movement overthrew the country's president, François Bozizé, and seized power in a nationwide campaign of violence. The country's new president, Michel Djotodia, officially dissolved Séléka in September 2013, but most of its fighters refused to disband. Clashes between them and the mainly Christian Anti-balaka militias, and attacks and reprisals against the civilian population, peaked in December 2013 ([OHCHR](#), 19 February 2014).

As of mid-2015, the situation was unstable and unpredictable in many parts of the country. Fighting continues between armed groups for the control of populations, territory and natural resources such as diamonds and gold, and all parties to the conflict have perpetrated human rights

abuses including massacres, killings, looting and gender-based violence (GBV) on a daily basis ([AI](#), 10 December 2014).

Armed herders and bandits known locally as *coupeurs de route* have also increasingly attacked civilians and forced people to flee their homes ([ICG](#), 12 December 2014). In recent months, the insecurity and violence have centred on western and central areas of the country, where most of the new displacement reported since the beginning of the year has taken place ([UNHCR](#); 27 April 2015; [ICG](#), 12 December 2014).

Catherine Samba-Panza became CAR's interim president in January 2014 and will remain in office until the end of the country's political transition period. After more than two and a half years of armed conflict and political upheaval, peace remains elusive despite ongoing reconciliation efforts at all levels of society, including a national forum held in Bangui in May 2015. In recognition of the continuing instability, the forum recommended delaying elections scheduled for August, but at the time of writing no new date had been set.

UN peacekeepers are present on the ground and some of the national army has been redeployed, but many western parts of the country remain under Anti-balaka control, while former Séléka militias dominate in the east.

Displacement caused by natural hazards

Heavy rains cause flooding and the destruction of homes and farmland in CAR every year. In 2014, at least 1,500 people had lost their homes in Bangassou, Bozoum, and Bangui by the end of the rainy season (IDMC Disaster-induced Displacement Database, May 2015). The rains and floods also affect people already displaced by conflict and violence and living in displacement sites, damaging their temporary shelters and pushing some to return home earlier than they had intended, and despite continuing insecurity (interview with IDP in Bangui, March 2014).

Displacement figures

The conflict that erupted in 2012 caused a humanitarian crisis and displacement on a vast scale, both within and beyond CAR's borders. There were an estimated 426,200 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country as of mid-May 2015 (unpublished CMP document, 19 May 2015, on file with IDMC). The vast majority have fled their homes since December 2012, but the figure also includes several hundred people living in protracted displacement in and around the northern town of Kabo, some of whom have recently begun returning to their homes ([IOM](#), 16 March 2015).

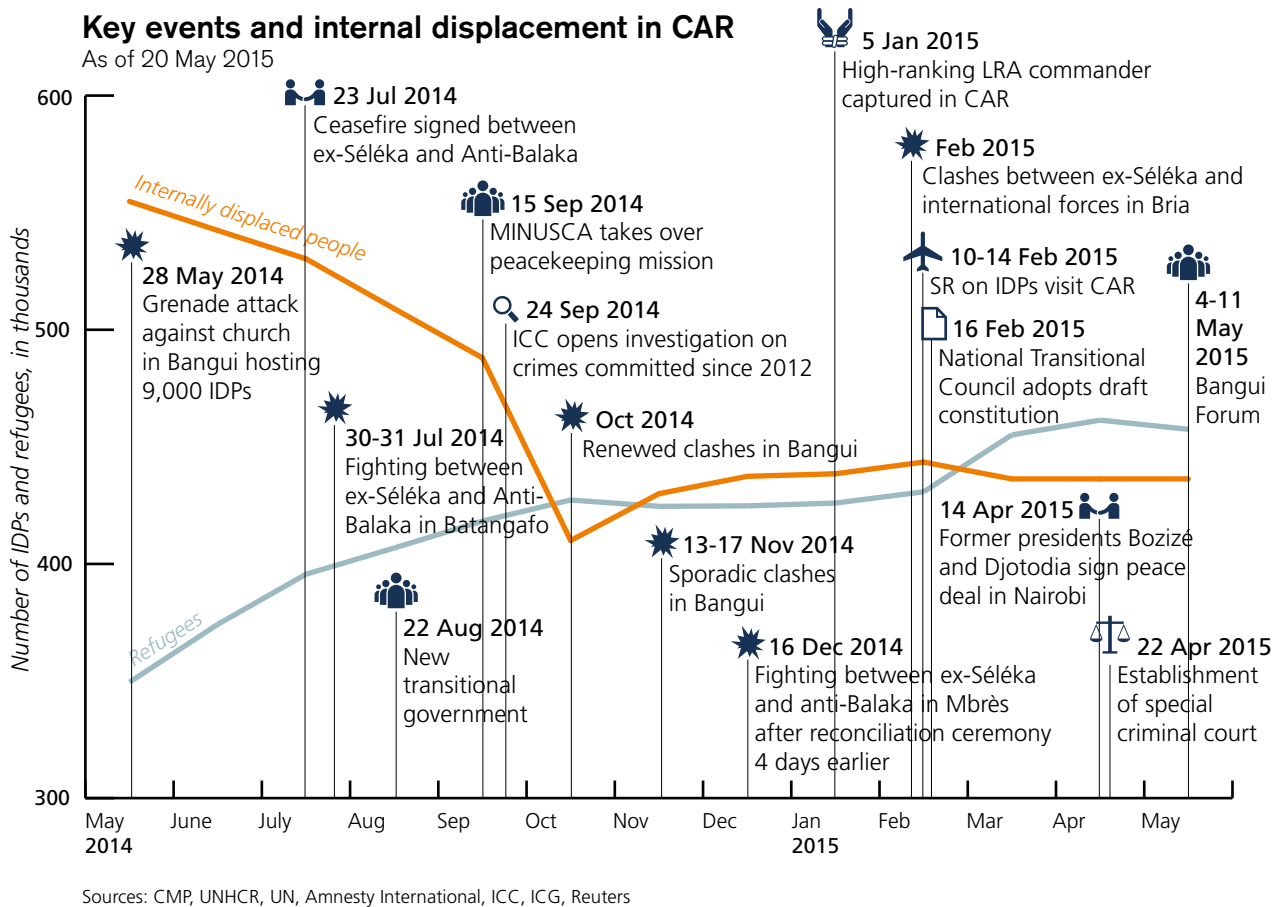
Based on reports from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Population Movement Commission (known by its French acronym CMP), IDMC estimates that more than 172,700 people were newly displaced in 2014 and at least 37,900 in the first three months of 2015. The true figures are likely to be higher, because for the most part only major incidents are captured. There were also around 457,480 refugees from CAR living in neighbouring countries as of mid-May ([UNHCR](#), 15 May 2015).

CMP publishes regular displacement estimates, using sources including the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the camp coordination and camp management cluster (CCCM), the rapid response mechanism coordinated by the UN Children's Fund, NGOs operating on the ground, and local authorities and leaders.

At the end of 2014, it introduced new initiatives to improve its figures, including border monitoring, a population tracking system and sub-offices that help to compile data at the local level.

Limitations

The geographical coverage of displacement has improved over the past year, not least thanks to CMP's new initiatives, but its figures can still only be considered rough estimates for a number of reasons.



Few if any short-term displacements are likely to be captured, and access to many areas, particularly the bush, is restricted. CMP's current methodologies endeavour to include IDPs living in displacement sites, with host families and in the bush, but they do not cover those living in rented or abandoned housing. The tracking of movements, whether new displacements or returns, is relatively recent and not comprehensive.

CMP's main challenges are insufficient funding, a shortage of technical experts, limited cooperation from other organisations and political pressure over displacement figures.

Displacement patterns

Most IDPs live in central and western areas of the country, where insecurity, violence and criminality continue to be most prevalent. As of May 2015,

there were 82,500 in Ouham prefecture, 64,800 in Ouaka, 58,700 in Bangui and 48,400 in Ombella M'Poko (unpublished CMP document, May 2015, on file with IDMC).

Displacement during the current crisis has taken place both within and between urban and rural areas. Some people have been displaced only very short distances from their homes, as is the case for many IDPs in Bangui. Others, such as a young man from Kaga Bandoro whom IDMC interviewed in early 2014, have fled several hundred kilometres.

New displacements since January 2015 have mainly taken place in central parts of the country and in areas bordering Cameroon and Chad (unpublished CMP maps, January to March, on file with IDMC).

Mass displacements, including pre-emptive flight caused by rumours, have mainly taken place

along the frontlines between Anti-balaka and former Séléka fighters in prefectures such as Ouaka and Ouham, where there have also been increasing reports of conflict between predominantly Christian farmers and Muslim herders. Three thousand people fled to Bambari in Ouaka from nearby villages in early January 2015 after armed herders attacked their communities (unpublished CMP map, January 2015, on file with IDMC).

As of May 2015, there were 224,500 IDPs living with host families, 167,800 in camp-like settings and spontaneous settlements - including in and around public buildings such as schools, churches and mosques - and 33,900 in the bush (unpublished CMP document, 19 May 2015, on file with IDMC). The latter figure could be much higher, given the limited access and difficulties in counting people in such areas.

Camp-like settings were almost non-existent in CAR before the current crisis, but there are now 114 (email correspondence with CMP). Most of them are in Ouaka, Nana-Gribizi and Ouham prefectures, and in and around Bangui (unpublished CMP map, April 2015, on file with IDMC).

Anecdotal evidence suggests people are being displaced more than once, particularly outside Bangui. Some IDPs have fled to the bush during a tense or dangerous period and then returned

home, only to be displaced again when the next shock hits. Pendular movements have also been observed, in which IDPs shuttle between their places of refuge and origin to cultivate land or check on their homes and belongings (IDMC interviews with humanitarians, Bangui, December 2014). It is not uncommon for male IDPs in some neighbourhoods of Bangui to leave their displacement sites during the day to work or check on their property.

Protection challenges and assistance needs

CAR's IDPs face a range of serious protection concerns, some of which already existed already before the current crisis but have been made worse since.

Physical security

IDPs' places of refuge do not always provide them with the protection from physical threats that they seek. Organisations working in displacement sites in Bangui report the presence of armed men, robberies and cases of summary justice. Displacement sites have also been the target of attacks motivated by revenge. In May 2014, assailants using grenades and small arms launched an assault on Notre Dame de Fatima church in Bangui, which was hosting 9,000 IDPs at the time.

Where are the IDPs in CAR?

As of May 2015



With host families
224,500 IDPs



In camp-like settings
167,800 IDPs



In the bush
33,900 IDPs



Seventeen people were killed and 27 abducted ([UNHCR](#), 30 May 2014).

The risk of GBV in displacement sites is heightened by their dire living conditions and the presence of armed men. Destitution has also forced displaced girls and young women to resort to survival sex, in some cases resulting in underage or unwanted pregnancies (unpublished report, November 2014).

People with disabilities are often left behind when their families flee, but those who are displaced faced additional threats both during their flight and in displacement sites. They are often unable to bring their wheelchairs and crutches, to move as fast as others or to take safer routes through the bush, leaving them vulnerable to fatal attacks by armed groups on roads ([HRW](#), 27 April 2015). Displacement sites are not adapted for people with reduced mobility, and the uneven terrain and open sewers have the potential to cause accidents.

Freedom of movement

Many IDPs suffer severe restrictions to their freedom of movement, particularly those living in areas referred to as enclaves. Muslims, Christians and members of the nomadic Peuhl ethnic group have all become trapped in such areas on their way to safer places or while regrouping to shield themselves against attack. Surrounded by armed militias and mobs, they are barely able to leave the enclaves if at all.

As of late January 2015, there were around 36,200 IDPs living in seven enclaves across the country - Berbérati, Boda, Bouar, Carnot, Dekoa, Yaloké and the PK5 neighbourhood in Bangui ([protection cluster](#), 6 February 2015). Those trapped face varying levels of security threats, movement restrictions and aid dependency.

The living conditions in many enclaves have deteriorated drastically over time ([HRW](#), 22 December 2014). Inhabitants endure the psychological stress

Pastoralism and displacement in CAR

Pastoralism in CAR is increasingly seen as linked to displacement in a number of ways. Clashes between predominantly Muslim pastoralists and Christian farmers are not new, but the armed conflict that began in 2012 has intensified tensions between them. This in turn helps to fuel the conflict and inter-communal violence, setting up a vicious circle and causing displacement ([ICG](#), 12 December 2014; [FAO](#), 6 May 2015).

Whether because of their perceived allegiance to certain armed groups or other communities' longstanding resentments, the country's nomadic minorities have been targeted by various parties to the conflict, and attacks against them have increased ([ICG](#), 12 December 2014).

They have been forced to abandon their traditional migratory routes and flee to eastern and northern areas of the country, and across the border into Cameroon and Chad. As of the end of 2014, western CAR had been largely emptied of its pastoralists, with the remaining few trapped in enclaves such as Boda and Yaloké.

As nomadic routes shift as a result of the conflict, areas such as those around Batangafo and Kabo have become overpopulated, pushing local pastoralists to seek grazing for their livestock elsewhere ([DRC](#), April 2015).

of entrapment and threats to their physical safety, and many are unable to access markets, work or cultivate their land, making them more vulnerable to food insecurity.

In early 2014, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the protection cluster, OCHA and others relocated 1,200 Muslims from the former

enclave in Bangui's PK12 neighbourhood ([HPN](#), September 2014). The transitional government, however, opposed further evacuations because it feared they would be seen as assisting ethnic cleansing. African Union (AU) and UN peacekeepers prevented Muslims in the Yaloké enclave from leaving the town ([HRW](#), 22 December 2014).

Economic and social situation

Many IDPs have lost the basis for their livelihoods as a result of their displacement. Displaced farmers tend to struggle to cultivate if they are able to do so at all, herders lose their livestock and traders' networks are disrupted and their stocks looted. The few belongings IDPs have left are sometimes stolen by armed men or other civilians (IDMC interviews with IDPs and humanitarians, Bangui, December 2014).

As a result, food insecurity among IDPs and their host communities in central, north-western and southern areas of the country was at crisis level as of April 2015 ([FEWS Net](#), April 2015). IDPs' dire socio-economic situation is made worse by their limited access to basic services, particularly in displacement sites and rural areas. Elderly IDPs and those with disabilities face additional challenges in accessing services because of their limited mobility and their lack of understanding of the situation ([HRW](#), 27 April 2015).

Violence and displacement have forced families to separate, and there are many unaccompanied children in CAR ([ICRC](#), 18 March 2015; [UN](#), December 2014; [child protection sub-cluster](#), 20 July 2014). Community members and religious leaders have looked after some in displacement sites, but without their parents' care, they are more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation and forced recruitment. A displaced boy in Yaloké died of malnutrition in February 2015, after refusing to eat until he and his siblings were reunited with their parents ([UNHCR](#), 17 February 2015).

Durable solutions

IDPs and returnees face numerous obstacles in returning to normal life following their displacement. Insecurity, loss of livelihoods, lack of shelter and other challenges to their housing, land and property (HLP) rights hamper or prevent many from achieving durable solutions. That said, some IDPs returned to their places of origin in Ouham Pendé, Ouham, Mambere-Kdaei, Bangui and Nana Mambere between January and March 2015 (unpublished CMP documents, on file with IDMC).

IDPs in Bangui said they had experienced pressure from authorities and humanitarian organisations to return to their homes, despite the feeling among those affected that security and law enforcement had not reached the threshold for them to do (IDMC interviews, December 2014).

Housing and food are also of particular concern, given the number of homes, granaries and crops that have been pillaged, burned or destroyed since the start of the 2012 crisis. Many properties have been stripped of all their furniture, tools, seeds and any other items deemed valuable ([NRC](#), 13 April 2015).

Rebuilding neighbourhoods where not only homes but also hospitals, schools and religious sites have been destroyed or damaged will require concerted efforts from the government, local authorities, the international community and IDPs themselves. Organised "go-and-see" visits to areas of origin in Bangui started at the end of 2014, and have been an opportunity for IDPs to assess the situation for themselves and to make an informed decision about whether to return or not (IDMC interviews with humanitarians, Bangui, December 2014).

IDPs' access to political participation, particularly in matters that directly concern them, is also an important element of re-establishing a normal

life. Representatives from displacement sites in Bangui were invited to take part in the national forum in the capital at the beginning May 2015. It remains to be seen, however, whether the UN Security Council's call to guarantee IDPs' right to vote in the next presidential and legislative elections will be upheld, particularly for those who do not yet wish to return home ([UN Security Council](#), 28 April 2015).

The humanitarian country team is in the process of drafting a durable solutions strategy. It has not, however, coordinated the task with national authorities that have been working on initiatives themselves, which has led to a degree of friction (IDMC interviews with national authorities and humanitarians, Bangui, December 2014). Greater coordination with the development sector, which has started to increase its activities in some areas, is also necessary if IDPs are to achieve durable solutions with security and dignity.

National and international response

CAR's government has struggled to fulfil its role as the primary provider of IDPs' protection and assistance, because of instability and its limited resources and capacity. It established a technical support unit for humanitarian action in April 2014, but thus far communication and collaboration with responders have been limited. The unit has some specific action points, but it had achieved little in terms of implementation as of the end of 2014.

The government has repeatedly shown its preference for IDPs' return. In January 2015, it announced plans to close the displacement site at the airport, once the biggest in the country. It cited security and development reasons and said it hoped IDPs would go back to their homes ([UNICEF](#), 19 January 2015). The majority living there, however, are reluctant to do so for the time

HLP rights and displaced women

IDPs in CAR face a number of challenges in exercising their HLP rights. As in many countries, displaced women are among those who struggle most to do so, because of discriminatory practices, a lack of understanding of their rights and few options to seek redress when they are not respected ([NRC](#), 13 April 2015).

Women in CAR tend to depend on their relationship with a man for land ownership, and given the current conflict, displacement and family separation, this poses a significant challenge for displaced women.

A study undertaken by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) at the end of 2014 revealed that they were at risk of eviction from their homes. After the death of their husband or partner, the family of the deceased often asks them to leave. This practice was observed across the country as a whole, but appeared most common in non-Muslim communities ([NRC](#), 13 April 2015).

As such, displaced women who have lost or been separated from their partner or husband may find that return to their places or origin becomes impossible, creating additional obstacles to their pursuit of durable solutions.

being, and the alternative site the government has identified is unsuitable and too small (IDMC interviews with humanitarians, Bangui, December 2014).

CAR is party to several international conventions that establish a framework for its response to displacement. They include the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region, known widely as the Great Lakes Pact, and its protocols on displacement; and the African Union Convention for the Protection and

Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, known widely as the Kampala Convention.

The domestication of the convention received a boost in July and August 2014, when the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) supported the government in establishing a roadmap and working group for the development of national legislation on IDPs' protection and assistance (unpublished roadmap, August 2015, on file with IDMC). After several months of delays while the government was restructured, a new focal point was appointed to coordinate the process in December 2014. A technical committee made up of national and international experts was also set up to lead the drafting exercise.

In December 2013, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) declared the crisis in CAR a level-three emergency, the most serious possible. As a result, a senior humanitarian coordinator was deployed at the end of the month and surge capacity was mobilised for the emergency response. The level-three status has been extended several times since.

Humanitarian space has shrunk significantly since the beginning of the crisis. A multitude of armed groups, militias and other armed men operate across the country, and shifting territorial control makes negotiations over access and safety guarantees for responders and their beneficiaries difficult ([UN](#), October 2014).

National and international humanitarian staff have been intimidated, and security incidents, including attempted kidnappings, are recorded on a daily basis. In March 2015, 112 security incidents were recorded, of which 14 related to direct violence against humanitarian organisations ([OCHA](#), 31 March 2015).

UN peacekeepers have been deployed across CAR since September 2014, when they took over from an African Union mission (known by its

French acronym MISCA). Its mandate includes the protection of civilians, support for the country's transition process and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance ([UN Security Council](#), 10 April 2014).

Organisations on the ground, however, have repeatedly voiced concern about the capacity of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in CAR (known by the French acronym MINUSCA), given the relatively few troops deployed compared with its full authorised strength (IDMC interviews with humanitarians, Bangui, December 2014). The shortfall jeopardises MINUSCA's ability to fulfil its primary role of protecting civilians.

There have also been repeated allegations that MISCA, MINUSCA and French troops present in CAR have committed human rights violations, including sexual violence ([African Arguments](#), 15 September 2014; [UN](#), 1 May 2015).

As the government may prolong the transition period by a few months, IDPs continue to face numerous challenges. Both the national authorities and international organisations require funding to respond to their needs, particularly given the prospect of protracted insecurity and humanitarian crisis, including new displacements. As of 4 May 2015, however, the strategic response plan for CAR was only 14 per cent funded ([FTS](#), 4 May 2015).

In order to address the challenges inherent in the delivery of assistance in a rapidly changing humanitarian and security situation, funding should be increased in ways that make it flexible and adaptable. The government and national and international organisations also require funding to rebuild the country's institutions, improve governance and end widespread impunity, including through the recently established special criminal court.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement. For the millions of people worldwide displaced within their own country, IDMC plays a unique role as a global monitor and evidence-based advocate to influence policy and action by governments, UN agencies, donors, international organisations and NGOs.

IDMC was established in 1998 at the request of the Interagency Standing Committee on humanitarian assistance. Since then, IDMC's unique global function has been recognised and reiterated in annual UN General Assembly resolutions.

IDMC is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an independent, non-governmental humanitarian organisation.

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