

AD HOC UPDATE #8: New influx from the Central African Republic to the DRC

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Highlights

- Local authorities in the DRC have reported the arrival of an estimated 92,000 individuals who fled from CAR as a result of the violence that erupted amid the December 2020 elections.
- As of 25 February 2021, UNHCR and CNR have biometrically registered a total of 39 795 new arrivals from CAR.
- From 18 – 19 February a joint mission of the Ambassadors of the United States, Netherlands and Sweden, the Representatives of UNHCR, WFP and the Director of USAID were in North Ubangi Province, to assess the humanitarian needs of thousands of new Central African refugees.



Visit of a joint mission to Modale site, North Ubangi Province where newly arrived refugees will soon be relocated © UNHCR/Fabien Faivre

L2 Emergency Declaration

On 21 January, a Level 2 emergency has been declared for the UNHCR Operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This decision is designed to scale up UNHCR operations' preparedness and response activities in addressing the protection needs of refugees and other populations affected by the new crisis.

I- SITUATION

• Elections

Presidential and legislative elections were held on 27 December 2020 in the Central African Republic (CAR) in a tense security context characterized by sporadic violence. Several armed groups, most of them, signatories of the February 2019 peace agreement, called off a ceasefire and merged into the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC). They resumed military operations against the government, carrying out deadly attacks in major towns including on the outskirts of the capital Bangui. There have been fears of further violence, since the validation of the victory of re-elected president, Faustin Archange Touadera by CAR's Constitutional Court on Monday 18 January 2021.

• Security situation

On 21 January, the CAR authorities declared a 15-day state of emergency across the country. As the situation remains tense within CAR, displacement is expected to continue in the near future. The newly displaced population reported human rights violations against civilians and looting by armed groups in various villages in CAR. Most of the new arrivals remain very close to the borders where they face risks of further attacks and rights violations by armed groups. The majority of them are women and children, while there are also many persons with special needs, such as elderly persons at risk, persons with disabilities and survivors of SGBV.

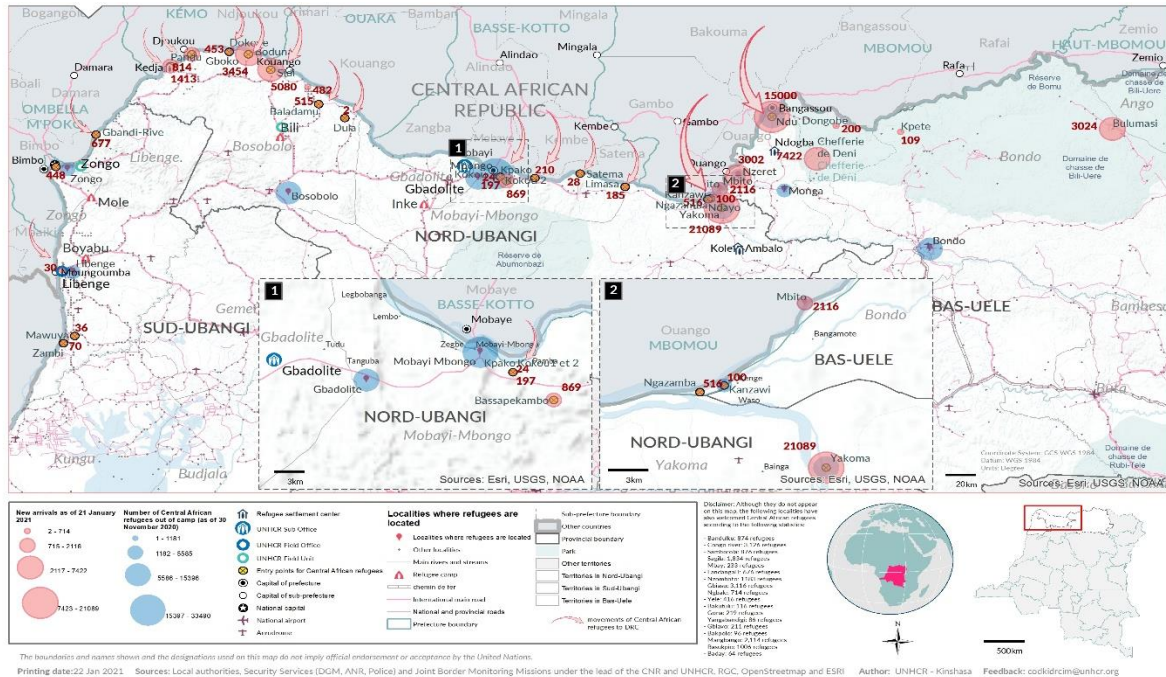
UNHCR and the National Commission for Refugees (CNR) joint monitoring teams at the border in the three provinces affected by the influx, report that, most of the arrivals are from the south-eastern town of Béma. Bangassou, and most recently, Bangui. A majority of the new arrivals are staying in makeshift shelters, while others live with host families.

• Consequences on the voluntary repatriation operation

Insecurity in CAR is affecting the voluntary repatriation operation, relaunched in November 2020 after the COVID-19 pandemic had forced border closures. More than 17,000 refugees currently living at Mole and Boyabu camps

in South Ubangi Province had expressed their intention to return home. However, several areas previously deemed safe to receive returnees are now possibly controlled by rebels. It should be noted that some of the new arrivals from the outskirts of Bangui are possibly refugees who had returned in recent voluntary repatriations from Mole and Boyabu camps in South Ubangi province, between 2019 and 2020.

Figure 1 : Entry points of newly arrived families from the Central African Republic



II- STATISTICS

According to local authorities, **92,053 individuals from the Central African Republic** have arrived in the DRC. (this estimated figure is yet to be verified). This includes an estimated 46,659 individuals in Bas Uele Province, 35,331 in North Ubangi Province and 10,063 in South Ubangi province. Most of the new arrivals have stayed close to the borders in some 40 villages along the banks of the border rivers that separate CAR from DRC.

A biometric registration of refugees is ongoing in several location along the border. As of 20 February 2021, UNHCR and CNR have biometrically registered a total of 11,478 households comprising 39,795 individual new asylum seekers from CAR.

III- NEEDS

The greatest needs of the new arrivals regard food, water, shelter, health care, documentation, education, core relief items and sanitation to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and epidemic diseases.

- An urgent vaccination drive is needed to mitigate a high risk of a major measles epidemic reported by joint health evaluation teams of UN Agencies, NGOs, and the Provincial Health Division in refugee hosting areas in North Ubangi Province. Less than 30% of refugee children under five are vaccinated. Suspected cases are already being reported among some host communities.
- Mobile clinics are urgently needed to reach populations in areas where there are no health services, in the three provinces affected by the new influx.
- Essential drugs are out of stock in most of the health zones in Yakoma, Bosobolo, Mobayi Mbongo Sagila and several other localities in North Ubangi, South Ubangi and Bas Uele Provinces.
- There have been several unassisted births among new arrivals in the 40 host communities in northern DRC. Women and girls are also in dire need of hygiene kits.

- There is a need to strengthen COVID-19 awareness and prevention measures at border services and host sites (with infra-red thermometers, masks, hand washing devices, etc.), given increased risks of infection as a result of mass movement and crowded settlement sites.
- Psychosocial support is needed, among others for survivors of SGBV. 79 cases of SGBV including rape, child marriage have already been identified in Bas Uele and South Ubangi Provinces, following protection screenings. The incidents occurred on CAR Territory.
- There is an urgent need to relocate the refugees staying in makeshift shelters or under open skies very close to the borders where they are susceptible to risks of attacks by armed groups from CAR or possible forced recruitment. Most of the areas they have settled in are also prone to floods and the rainy season will start in the course of March.
- There is a need for community shelters for the most vulnerable refugees.
- Emergency communal latrines and bathing spaces are needed as well as hygiene promotion.
- Plastic sheets are needed for the construction of emergency WASH infrastructure.
- Emergency education services are needed to reinforce protection for children who make up a significant portion of the displaced population.
- Insufficient quantities of emergency supplies for the thousands of new refugees in dire need of life-saving assistance.
- Prices of basic commodities are gradually increasing in several host areas such as in Sambolola, Yakoma and Ndu. Price inflation will have an impact on households' ability to access food.
- UNHCR is raising resources to airlift more emergency supplies from Kinshasa to Gbadolite to assist people in need as quickly as possible. Further resources for trucking this equipment to the border areas as well as for warehousing stocks are also needed.
- Logistics support to transport more core relief items to affected areas is very urgent, given the approach of the rainy season, which will render movement on already extremely degraded or quasi inexistent roads in both North Ubangi and Bas Uele provinces impossible.

IV- ACTIONS

- As of 25 February 2021, UNHCR and CNR have biometrically registered a total of 11,478 households comprising 39,795 individual new asylum seekers from CAR. The figure includes 19,705 persons in Ndu, Yele/Bangalo, Ibango, Yangi and Sahali in Bas Uele Province, 10,788 persons in Yakoma and Limasa, North Ubangi Province, and 9,302 persons in Sagila, Mbay, Vigilant, Zamboto and Sambolola in South Ubangi Province. About 29% of the total number of registered refugees were already in the UNHCR database. These are people who must have returned spontaneously to CAR before electoral violence in December.
- UNHCR is biometrically registering up to 1,000 new arrivals per day, which enables the early identification of people with vulnerabilities. UNHCR is working closely with the government, is scaling up registration activities, and will update the population figures based on actual registrations
- UNHCR and partners are carrying out protection, screenings at registration sites. Through these screenings, 5,517 persons with specific needs have already been identified in Ndu, Yakoma, and Sagila in Bas Uele, North and South Ubangi provinces respectively. They include 1,378 separated or unaccompanied children, women at risk, people with disabilities and serious medical conditions.
- About 79 cases of SGBV have also been reported in Ndu, Nzomboto, Vigilant and Sagila in South Ubangi Province. The incidents occurred on CAR territory. UNHCR partner AIDES has been providing psychosocial support to the survivors. World Vision also organized trainings and distributed socio-economic reintegration kits to two associations of SGBV survivors in Yakoma, North Ubangi Province.
- UNHCR has set up community protection structures in refugee hosting sites, while local NGOs are carrying out awareness raising. In the past week, GAPROF has reached 1000 persons in Ndu through such sessions.
- About 48 of 74 identified Central African refugee children recently born on Congolese territory have received birth certificates thanks to UNHCR, CNR and civil registration officers in Chefferie Soa in Ndu, Bas Uele Province. These birth certificates help to prevent statelessness and facilitate protection and assistance to both refugee children and their families. UNHCR also distributed treated mosquito nets and sleeping mats to the 74 children and their lactating mothers.
- UNHCR and UNICEF carried out joint distributions in Yakoma, North Ubangi Province, reaching about 6,900 individuals with soap and 485 CAR refugee and host community households with buckets and jerrycans, to improve hygiene and sanitation conditions and to prevent diseases.
- UNHCR and partner ADSSE distributed emergency supplies such as blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets and mosquito nets to 3,490 extremely vulnerable households of newly arrived CAR refugees over the past weeks. The figures comprise 539 households in Ndu (Bas Uele), 2,137 households in Yakoma (North Ubangi), 10 of which were host community members, and 764 refugee households in the localities of Sagila, Vigilant and Nzomboto in South Ubangi Province. UNHCR distributed blankets and mosquito nets to a few lactating mothers who gave birth in very poor conditions in Sagila without access to health services. UNHCR and UNICEF furthermore carried out

joint distributions in Yakoma, North Ubangi Province, reaching about 6,900 individuals with soap and 485 CAR refugee and host community households with buckets and jerrycans, to improve hygiene and sanitation conditions and to prevent diseases.

- AIDES carried out medical and nutrition screening for 17,814 registered refugees in Ndu, Bas Uele province. As the screening proceeds, treatment is being administered for prevalent diseases such as Malaria, intestinal infections, diarrhoea, respiratory tract infections and malnutrition.
- UNHCR and AIDES distributed essential drugs and nutrition supplies to some of the new arrivals in a total of 11 sites visited by health evaluation teams in North Ubangi Province.
- UNHCR built 20 emergency latrines, 20 emergency bathing cubicles, upgraded the superstructure of 35 latrines and bathing cubicles, trained 50 community hygiene promotion volunteers and supported them with face masks in Ndu, Bas Uele Province. It also facilitated the construction of 20 communal latrines in Ndu, through community mobilization.
- UNHCR's partner ACTED has rehabilitated and disinfected seven hand pumps to improve potable water supply for new CAR refugees in Ndu, Bas Uele Province during the rapid evaluation phase. ADSSE has distributed aquatabs to 1,000 refugee and host community households in Ndu, Bas Uele Province, with support from UNICEF.
- UNHCR's partner ADSSE carried out 10 community awareness-raising sessions on handwashing, environmental hygiene, food and fluid handling.
- UNHCR and DRC's National Refugee Commission (CNR) have signed agreements to develop the Modale site near Yakoma, North Ubangi province, for 10,000 refugees.
- UNHCR and CNR joint teams continue to monitor the situation at the borders along the Ubangi River.

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