

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

In Central African Republic, attacks on education increased between 2017 and 2018, and decreased between 2018 and 2019, marking an overall decline as compared to the 2013-2017 reporting period. The military use of schools by non-state armed groups persisted, with many groups establishing checkpoints near school grounds.

Context

After a period of relative calm following the 2012-2015 crisis, violence escalated again in 2017 and 2018 in Ouaka, Haute-Kotto prefectures and Nana-Grébizi prefectures of the Central African Republic (CAR).⁴⁹² Armed groups, which controlled over half of the country in 2018, continually fragmented and proliferated, often capitalizing on interreligious and inter-communal tensions for their own benefit.⁴⁹³ Fighting between ex-Séléka and anti-balaka factions continued to spark retaliatory killings between ethnic and religious communities across the country.⁴⁹⁴

In 2018, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reported that armed groups continued to target civilians and humanitarian aid workers and that both UN peacekeepers, national security forces and armed groups committed acts of sexual violence against women and girls, as well as boys and men.⁴⁹⁵ These abuses were consistent with the mapping of human rights violations from 2003-2015 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which also highlighted the arson of schools.⁴⁹⁶

On February 6, 2019, the CAR government and representatives of 14 armed groups signed the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, in Bangui, after 18 months of negotiations.⁴⁹⁷ In this agreement, as well as action plans between the UN and three ex-Séléka factions, armed groups committed to ending grave violations against children, including attacks on schools.⁴⁹⁸ In August 2019, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) reported that incidents of abuse and human rights violations declined in the first half of 2019 as compared to the same period in 2018, from 1,674 to 565 incidents, the vast majority of which were committed by non-state armed groups.⁴⁹⁹

Conflict deeply impacted civilians between 2017 and 2019. In 2019, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that one out of every four Central Africans was either displaced or a refugee, with the numbers of asylum seekers in neighboring countries increasing by approximately six percent annually during the 2017-2019 reporting period.⁵⁰⁰ The CAR Protection Cluster documented more than 1,000 protection incidents per month in 2018.⁵⁰¹

Save the Children classified CAR as one of the ten worst countries for children impacted by conflict in 2019.⁵⁰² The UN found that the rate of child recruitment by state forces and non-state armed groups quadrupled in 2017 as compared to 2016, with 196 boys and 103 girls affected.⁵⁰³ Some success occurred in 2018, when the United Nations reported assisting in the release of 913 children, including 242 girls, from armed groups.⁵⁰⁴

Education was explicitly targeted in the conflict, or affected by insecurity. In October 2018, the UN reported that 340 schools were non-functional and 28 of those were occupied by internally displaced persons (IDPs) or armed groups.⁵⁰⁵ The violence took a toll on educational achievement: in 2017, CAR had a primary school completion rate of only 49 percent.⁵⁰⁶ Insecurity also prevented teachers from deploying to regional schools;⁵⁰⁷ as a result, maître-parents, or parents who took on teaching roles without formal qualifications, made up over 50 percent of teachers in CAR in 2017, according to the Ministry of Education.⁵⁰⁸

Attacks on schools

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected reports documenting at least 97 attacks on schools. This was fewer reported incidents as compared to the period between 2013 and 2017, when over 100 attacks on schools were reported.⁵⁰⁹ Also, in comparison to the previous reporting period, arson remained one of the most commonly reported forms of attacks on schools, whereas reports of pillaging decreased. The UN reported that the majority of verified attacks on schools were perpetrated by ex-Séléka factions.⁵¹⁰

In 2017, the CAR Education Cluster reported attacks on more than 60 schools, affecting the education of at least 150,000 children.⁵¹¹ During that same period, the UN verified 28 attacks against schools; anti-balaka, Popular Front for the Renaissance in the Central African Republic (FPRC), and Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) figured among the groups responsible.⁵¹² In addition, at the end of 2017, insecurity forced the closure of 500 schools, with particularly dire situations in Basse-Kotto, Haute-Kotto, Haut-Mbomou and Mbomou prefectures.⁵¹³

In 2018, the UN verified 34 attacks on schools in CAR, marking a 21 percent increase in the number of verified incidents compared with 2017.⁵¹⁴ The total number of incidents collected by the Education Cluster was not available for comparison. At the time of writing, GCPEA had collected media, UN, and NGO reports of 21 attacks on school in 2018.⁵¹⁵ Of these schools, fourteen were alternative education spaces financed through international donors that were reportedly destroyed or burned, although details on the perpetrating parties and dates of attacks remained unconfirmed.⁵¹⁶ Due to constrained access to UN data, it remained unclear how many reports collected by GCPEA were also included in UN-verified counts.

Other reported attacks on public or community primary schools included the following:

- On an unspecified date in early January 2018, Latiou Primary School, Haute-Kotto prefecture was burned by members of an unknown armed group, destroying the roof and desks. The school subsequently closed for an unspecified amount of time.⁵¹⁷
- During retaliatory fighting between FPRC and MPC elements on an unspecified date in the first half of 2018, the directors' offices of Maraomba and Blagadja primary schools near Mbrès town, Nana-Grébizi prefecture, were reportedly damaged, and teaching materials were found scattered outside the buildings.⁵¹⁸
- During the abovementioned fighting between FPRC and the Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC) near Mbrès, the Maraomba pre-school was reportedly burned, which destroyed teaching supplies.⁵¹⁹
- In March 2018, an explosion reportedly destroyed the public primary school of Andjou, Ouaka prefecture, killing and injuring civilians, though the number of injuries or deaths of students or teachers is unknown.⁵²⁰

In the first quarter of 2019, the UN verified four attacks on schools, an 88 percent reduction from the UN's collection of verified data for 2019.⁵²¹

Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel

Over the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected reports documenting a total of 13 attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel,⁵²² occurring occasionally as observed between 2013 and 2016.⁵²³

After the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*, GCPEA identified one report of an attack on a school teacher in 2017, wherein suspected ex-Séléka assailants abducted a school director in Pombolo, Mbomou prefecture, on an unspecified day in December 2017.⁵²⁴ In comparison, GCPEA identified seven reported attacks on school students and personnel in 2018, and five in 2019, detailed below.

In 2018 and 2019, GCPEA received at least three reports of abductions of maître-parents. In all three cases, the maître-parents worked in alternative education centers funded by international organizations within IDP sites. In two cases that reportedly occurred on February 11 and 12, 2019, in PK3 IDP site near Bria town, Haute-Kotto prefecture, and Ndou-bou IDP site in Batangafo, Ouham prefecture, respectively, the maître-parents were on their way to or returning from trainings provided by national partners.⁵²⁵ In the third case, in early November in PK3, Bria town, the maître-parent was reportedly abducted by anti-balaka forces whilst farming. Association with humanitarian organizations was known to increase the risk of kidnapping for ransom in CAR.⁵²⁶

Other reported attacks on teachers in 2018 included:

- On January 18, 2018, members of an ex-Séléka faction killed the principal of Yengue school, in Mbomou prefecture, amid ongoing violence that had broken out in December 2017.⁵²⁷
- On February 25, 2018, unidentified armed attackers killed five humanitarian education workers and a UN consultant who were traveling to deliver a teacher training in Markounda, Northwestern prefecture. The UN Security Council later condemned the attack.⁵²⁸

- In early March 2018, a primary school teacher was reportedly killed near a school in Goubali, Ouaka prefecture while schoolchildren were present; the school was also reportedly damaged as a result of the attack by unknown armed assailants.⁵²⁹
- On March 17, 2018, anti-balaka forces reportedly abducted an education counsellor in Bangassou town, Mbo-mou prefecture, after finding suspected “Muslim” names in his cellphone, the Central African Network of Human Rights Journalists (Réseau des journalistes pour les droits de l’homme) reported. The perpetrators allegedly demanded a ransom for his release.⁵³⁰

In addition, one incident of threats to school children was recorded on November 19, 2018, when members of an unspecified armed group reportedly set up barriers to prevent children from entering Maidou school in Bambari, Ouaka prefecture. According to an international NGO, the school welcomed both Muslim and Christian students. The armed men reportedly threatened to abduct the children.⁵³¹

In 2019, attacks on education personnel appeared to marginally decline as compared to the previous year, with GCPEA collecting two reports of killings of educational personnel, as well as the abduction of a maître-parent detailed above. These included:

- On January 19, 2019, UPC forces allegedly killed a humanitarian worker and a teacher in Bambari, Ouaka prefecture, according to *Radio Ndeke Luka* and the Aid Worker Security Database.⁵³²
- Local media and the Education Cluster reported that on July 20, 2019, the principal of a private Catholic school in Niem-Yelewa, Nana-Mambéré prefecture, was murdered by unknown assailants.⁵³³
- On May 26, 2019, unidentified armed assailants killed the head of the Education Sector and his driver, on the road from Kabo to Moyon Sido, Ouham prefecture. The victims were returning from collecting data for the education statistical yearbook.⁵³⁴
- On an unspecified date in August 2019, unidentified armed men reportedly robbed eight teachers returning from a training workshop held by an international NGO.⁵³⁵

Military use of schools and universities

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA documented at least 32 reports of military use of schools, including checkpoints, camps, and bases. Military use during the period occurred at a similar rate as during the 2013-2017 reporting period, when dozens of schools were under use by armed forces or armed groups, some for extended periods of time.⁵³⁶ Military use occurred in Haute-Kotto, Nana-Grébizi, Mambéré-Kadéï, Ouham-Pendé, and Ouaka prefectures, and was perpetrated by armed groups and state security forces. At least three schools were under use by armed groups in 2017, and the UN reported that 12 schools were damaged in this period due to long-term military use.⁵³⁷ During 2017, GCPEA identified reports of at least 16 counts of military use of schools, primarily in Ouaka prefecture.⁵³⁸

For 2018, GCPEA collected 13 reports of military use of schools and educational facilities occurring.⁵³⁹ Armed groups were responsible for all but one reported use, which in many cases also led to the destruction of school furniture and infrastructure, and to school closures in surrounding areas. During this same period, the UN verified the military use of seven schools, four of which were attributed to FPRC, two to 3R, and one to anti-balaka forces.⁵⁴⁰

Some instances of military use included:

- On January 10, 2018, UN sources reported the continued presence of a military base in front of a school in Kombélé, Ouaka prefecture, in place since at least November 8, 2017.⁵⁴¹
- From mid-February 2018 until at least June 2018, four schools in Bria town, Haute-Kotto, were occupied by armed groups and, during this time, were completely destroyed and pillaged by anti-balaka and ex-Séléka elements during recurrent fighting. The UN also verified damage to school buildings and furniture.⁵⁴²
- In late March 2018, members of the 3R armed group reportedly occupied the Sub-Prefectural Primary School in Kouï, Ouham-Pendé prefecture, while their leader resided in front of the school. The school reportedly remained operational during the occupation.⁵⁴³

- On April 25, 2018, the Education Cluster reported that FPRC used two schools near Kaga-Bandoro, Nana-Grébizi prefecture. The Cluster noted that 33 out of 77 schools in the prefecture closed after the FPRC's presence in the area, affecting the education of 21,665 students, including 9,870 girls.⁵⁴⁴
- The UN Department of Safety and Security reported that on December 4, 2018, 120 3R elements were camped in Dilapoko school in Mambéré-Kadéï prefecture. The men were reportedly heavily armed.⁵⁴⁵
- In the town of Digui, Ouaka prefecture, armed groups allegedly used a school on multiple occasions, intimidating staff and students and demanding to use the mobile phone network, according to a report by an international organization in December 2018. This led to the closure of the school and interrupted the education of approximately 200 students.⁵⁴⁶

The establishment of checkpoints at or near schools also remained a common form of military use in 2018. On November 6, 2018, an international organization reported an FPRC military checkpoint in front of Piango School in Bria; the group was also reportedly using the Ministry of Education office located in front of the school.⁵⁴⁷ Another international organization reported that the checkpoint was still in existence on January 25, 2019 and that armed groups, on two occasions, had approached ministry officials to inquire about the identities of individuals who had requested that the checkpoint be removed; ministry officials perceived this as a threat.⁵⁴⁸ On November 19, 2018, armed groups stationed themselves near Maidou school in Bambari, Ouaka prefecture where they set up a checkpoint and occupied surrounding houses.⁵⁴⁹

In 2019, military use of schools, both by state and non-state armed parties, occurred less frequently than in the previous year. The UN verified six incidents of use of schools by armed forces or armed groups;⁵⁵⁰ these included violations by UPC, 3R, and MPC armed groups in Ouaka, Haute-Kotto, Basse-Kotto, Ouham-Pendé, and Haute-Mbomou prefectures.⁵⁵¹ GCPEA also received two reports of incidents of military use at the time of writing:

- On January 25, 2019, an international organization reported that the Ministry of Education office in Bria, Haute-Kotto prefecture, continued to be under use by FPRC.⁵⁵² The office was located near the Piango School in Bria, where the checkpoint reported in November 2018 was also observed at the time of this report.⁵⁵³
- In Alindao, Basse-Kotto prefecture, UPC used a preschool in late May 2019. The report also indicated that the group had set up a checkpoint only 20 meters from the school.⁵⁵⁴ The armed group vacated the school in July 2019.⁵⁵⁵

⁴⁹² Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019), Central African Republic chapter; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2017/2018*, (London: Amnesty International, 2018), Central African Republic chapter, p. 118.

⁴⁹³ OCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan: January-December 2019, (Bangui: OCHA, December 2018), pp. 8-9.

⁴⁹⁴ ICG, *Central African Republic: The Roots of Violence*, (Brussels: ICG, September 21, 2015), Africa Report no. 230.

⁴⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019*, Central African Republic chapter; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2017/2018*, Central African Republic chapter, p. 118.

⁴⁹⁶ "Report of the Mapping Project documenting serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Central African Republic between January 2003 and December 2015," OHCHR, May 2017.

⁴⁹⁷ "Central African Republic: Justice Vital to Peace," Human Rights Watch news release, February 22, 2019; UN Security Council, "Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic," S/2019/145, February 2019.

⁴⁹⁸ UN Security Council, "Children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General," S/2019/852, October 30, 2019, paras. 61-62.

⁴⁹⁹ "Decline in incidents of abuse and human rights violations in CAR during the first half of 2019 (Baisse des incidents d'abus et violations des droits de l'homme en RCA durant le premier semestre 2019)," MINUSCA press release, August 7, 2019.

⁵⁰⁰ OCHA, "Central African Republic: Humanitarian Needs Overview (RCA: Aperçu des Besoins Humanitaires (HNO 2020)," October 2019, p. 38.

⁵⁰¹ Cluster Protection's figures, October 2018, as cited in "Central African Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report," UNICEF, December 2018.

⁵⁰² Save the Children, *Stop the War on Children: Protecting Children in 21st Century Conflict*, (Save the Children, 2019), p. 10.

⁵⁰³ UN General Assembly and Security Council "Children in Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General" A/72/865-S/2018/465, May 16, 2018, para. 36.

⁵⁰⁴ "Central African Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report," UNICEF, December 2018.

⁵⁰⁵ OCHA, "Humanitarian Response Plan : January – December 2019," OCHA, December 2018, p. 9.

⁵⁰⁶ CAR Intercluster Coordinating Group, "Periodic monitoring report: Humanitarian Response Plan 2018 (Rapport périodique de monitoring: plan de réponse humanitaire 2018)," June 2018.

⁵⁰⁷ OCHA, "Humanitarian Response Plan : January – December 2019," OCHA, December 2018, p. 32.; Education Cluster CAR, "Education Cluster Strategy Central African

- Republic 2019-2021 (Stratégie Cluster Education Republique Centrafricaine 2019-2021),” February 2019.
- ⁵⁰⁸ MEPSTA, “Central African Republic: Statistical Yearbook 2016-2017 (RCA: Annuaire statistique 2016-2017)”, (Bangui: MEPSTA, December 2017), p. 137.
- ⁵⁰⁹ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, p. 99.
- ⁵¹⁰ UN Security Council, “Children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2019/852, October 30, 2019, para. 43.
- ⁵¹¹ CAR Education Cluster, “Annual Information Bulletin 2017 – Central African Republic (Bulletin Annuel d’Information – 2017),” February 25, 2018, p. 1.
- ⁵¹² UN Secretary General and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary General,” A/72/865-S/2018/465, May 16, 2018, para 40.
- ⁵¹³ United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic,” S/2018/125, February 15, 2018, para. 30.
- ⁵¹⁴ UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2019/509, July 30, 2019, para. 37.
- ⁵¹⁵ Information received from a UN respondent via email on November 12, 2018; Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵¹⁶ Information received by a UN respondent via email on November 12, 2018.
- ⁵¹⁷ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵¹⁸ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵¹⁹ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵²⁰ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵²¹ Information received from a UN respondent via email on May 7, 2020.
- ⁵²² A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_references.pdf
- ⁵²³ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, pp. 99-100.
- ⁵²⁴ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵²⁵ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵²⁶ Interview with UN respondent on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵²⁷ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵²⁸ “Security Council condemns attack on education workers in Central African Republic,” UN News, March 6, 2018; Richard Pérez Peña, “6 Aid Workers Killed Amid Chaos in Central African Republic,” *The New York Times*, February 28, 2018.
- ⁵²⁹ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵³⁰ Réseau des journalistes pour les droits de l’homme, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN3941.
- ⁵³¹ Email received on March 13, 2019 from CAR Education Cluster
- ⁵³² *Radio Ndeke Luka*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN4379; Aid Worker Security, Security incident data, Last updated: December 4, 2019.
- ⁵³³ Education Cluster CAR, “Information Bulletin, Second Quarter 2019 (Bulletin d’information, Deuxième trimestre 2019),” August 2019, p. 2.; *Corbeau News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN4696 (data downloaded December 5, 2019).
- ⁵³⁴ Information received from a UN respondent via email on November 5, 2019.
- ⁵³⁵ Information received from an international humanitarian organization via email on September 30, 2019.
- ⁵³⁶ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, p. 102.
- ⁵³⁷ UN Secretary General and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/72/865-S/2018/465, May 16, 2018, para. 40.
- ⁵³⁸ Human Rights Watch, *No Class: When Armed Groups Use Schools in the Central African Republic*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, March 2017), pp. 19-20; CAR Education Cluster Database, shared with GCPEA on March 30, 2017; UN OCHA, “Central African Republic: Region: East, Bambari - Weekly Situation Report No. 32 (13 August 2017) (République Centrafricaine : Région : Est, Bambari Rapport hebdo de la situation no 32 (13 Août 2017),” August 13, 2017, p. 3.
- ⁵³⁹ UNDSS, “Weekly security bulletin (Bulletin quotidien sécuritaire),” December 5, 2018, p. 2. Shared by UN respondent; Email received on March 13, 2019 from UN respondent.
- ⁵⁴⁰ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict,” S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 37.
- ⁵⁴¹ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁴² Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁴³ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁴⁴ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁴⁵ UNDSS, “Weekly security bulletin (Bulletin quotidien sécuritaire),” December 5, 2018, p. 2. Shared by UN respondent.
- ⁵⁴⁶ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁴⁷ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁴⁸ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁴⁹ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁵⁰ Information received from a UN respondent, May 7, 2020.
- ⁵⁵¹ Education Cluster CAR, “Information Bulletin, Second Quarter 2019 (Bulletin d’information, Deuxième trimestre 2019),” August 2019; Information received from a UN respondent on May 7, 2020.
- ⁵⁵² Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁵³ Information received from a UN respondent via email on March 13, 2019.
- ⁵⁵⁴ Information received from a UN respondent via email on August 15, 2019.
- ⁵⁵⁵ Information received from a UN respondent via email on May 7, 2020.