

## CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

*During the 2020-2021 reporting period, there were at least 85 incidents of non-state armed groups, state armed forces, and pro-state allied groups occupying or attacking schools, mostly in the context of election-related violence. Police also used excessive force against school and university students and personnel during the reporting period.*

### Context

The security situation in Central African Republic (CAR) deteriorated during the 2020-2021 reporting period. A 2019 peace deal between the government and 14 armed groups collapsed in late 2020,<sup>489</sup> after the Constitutional Court invalidated former president Francois Bozizé's candidacy in the presidential elections.<sup>490</sup> In response, the newly formed Coalition des Patriotes pour le Changement (CPC – Coalition of Patriots for Change), a group of non-state armed groups mobilized in part by Bozizé,<sup>491</sup> called for the elections to be postponed.<sup>492</sup>

The CPC attacked and occupied several cities and towns during the reporting period, causing an increase in violence nationally.<sup>493</sup> Between mid-December 2020 and late January 2021, violence affected at least ten of CAR's 16 prefectures, covering the western half of the country, as well as parts of the center and the south.<sup>494</sup> CAR armed forces (FACA), peacekeepers from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), bilateral allied forces, and private military personnel combatted the CPC.<sup>495</sup> In March and October 2021, the UN raised concerns over CAR's hiring of foreign fighters and found evidence of human rights abuses and violations of international law by private security forces operating jointly with FACA, and in some instances UN peacekeepers.<sup>496</sup>

Civilians suffered the worst effects of armed conflict during the reporting period. In 2021, 3.1 million people, or around two-thirds of the population, needed humanitarian assistance, including 1.3 million children, according to the UN.<sup>497</sup> Between December 2020 and February 2021, over 240,000 people were newly internally displaced by electoral violence<sup>498</sup> and over 110,000 fled the country.<sup>499</sup> Around 1.4 million people were internally displaced or refugees at the end of 2021.<sup>500</sup> The UN reported that almost 3,000 children were recruited by armed groups within the first seven weeks of 2021.<sup>501</sup> The number of incidents involving explosive weapons increased in 2021, with over 30 incidents reported in 2021, some of which affected civilians, including children, according to the UN.<sup>502</sup>

The UN reported that the increase in violence following the elections led to schools being used for military purposes, damaged, or forced to close in 11 out of 16 prefectures.<sup>503</sup> At least 999 schools were non-operational as a result of fighting, and half of the country's children were out of school because of the renewed fighting.<sup>504</sup> School closures in March 2020 in response to Covid-19 also disrupted the learning of more than 1.4 million students; in areas affected by violence, such as in the far north prefecture of Vakaga, in Haut-Mbomou in the southeast, and in parts of Ouham and Ouham Pendé in the west, school openings were delayed.<sup>505</sup> The UN reported that insecurity in these regions has displaced many teachers, destroyed schools, and caused children to stay home out of fear.<sup>506</sup> School closures led to increased risks of child recruitment and use, and sexual violence,<sup>507</sup> as well as being linked to an increase in pregnancy among girls.<sup>508</sup>

### Attacks on schools

GCPEA collected reports documenting over 48 attacks on schools during the 2020-2021 reporting period. The UN verified four attacks on schools in 2019,<sup>509</sup> and 34 attacks in 2018.<sup>510</sup> While attacks increased in 2020 and 2021 as compared to 2019, rates remained lower than an earlier peak on attacks on schools reported in *Education under Attack 2018*.

The UN verified 23 attacks against schools and protected personnel in 2020.<sup>511</sup> The majority of these incidents occurred during and immediately following the elections on December 27, 2020, when the UN verified that the CPC attacked 17 schools serving as polling stations.<sup>512</sup> Of these, 14 such incidents occurred in Nana Mambéré, Mambéré-Kadei, Basse-Kotto and Bamingui-Bangoran prefectures.<sup>513</sup> Throughout 2020, GCPEA collected reports documenting at least three attacks on schools but was not able to determine whether any of these were included in the UN's total.<sup>514</sup> These included:

- On March 27, 2020, an unidentified armed group set a school on fire in Ndele, Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture,

according to a local media source.<sup>515</sup>

- On September 9, 2020, a non-state armed group reportedly raided classrooms in a school in Niem, Nana-Mambéré prefecture, forcing students to leave, and driving out teachers and the school director, according to a local media source.<sup>516</sup>

In 2021, the UN documented 25 incidents of attacks on schools; of these, 18 were verified and occurred between January and June<sup>517</sup> while the remaining seven were reported between September and November.<sup>518</sup> In addition, the UN verified 75 incidents of attacks on schools and military use of schools between December 2020 and July 2021.<sup>519</sup> While many of these incidents likely took place in 2021, GCPEA could not disaggregate the total by year, nor could GCPEA determine how many were attacks and how many were military use of schools. In addition, GCPEA identified two media reports of attacks on schools in 2021, which may be included in the UN count:

- *Radio Ndeke Luka* reported that on an unspecified date in early January 2021, a non-state armed group reportedly destroyed a primary school in Yassinda district of Bangui. According to locals, the group also burned and looted teaching materials.<sup>520</sup>
- Media sources reported that around April 14, 2021, alleged pro-government private security forces reportedly destroyed school furniture and looted private shops in Batangafo, Ouham prefecture, after taking over the city from a non-state armed group. Residents reported to a local media source they also destroyed school furniture or used it as firewood.<sup>521</sup>

### ***Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel***

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA collected two reported attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel. Both attacks were connected to education-related protests by students or teachers. In contrast, GCPEA identified seven such attacks in 2019 and four in 2018, most of which were perpetrated by armed groups.<sup>522</sup> This decrease may be due to under-reporting or a decline in such incidents during Covid-19 related school closures.

In 2020, GCPEA identified one reported attack on students. On March 2, 2020, thousands of secondary school students allegedly marched in the Fifth Arrondissement area of Bangui, demanding that authorities end school shift systems and calling for the regularization of non-permanent contractual teachers who were on strike. Demonstrators reportedly clashed with military and security forces, leaving several students injured.<sup>523</sup>

In addition, GCPEA collected one reported attack on teachers in 2020. On March 4, 2020, non-permanent contracted teachers went on strike in Bangui to demand employment. Several teachers protested in front of the Office of the Prime Minister in the Fifth Arrondissement area of Bangui, where police forces intervened and arrested at least 11 protesters.<sup>524</sup> At the time of writing GCPEA had not identified any attacks on school students, teachers, or other education personnel in 2021.

### ***Military use of schools and universities***

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA collected at least 45 reports of military use of schools, an increase as compared to previous years. GCPEA identified six cases of military use in 2019 and 13 reports in 2018.<sup>525</sup> Some UN reporting for 2020 and 2021, described in the above section on attacks on schools, did not distinguish between attacks and military occupation, meaning that the total number of schools used may have been higher. Military use was likely under-reported during the reporting period due to challenges in data collection.<sup>526</sup>

The UN reported the military use of ten schools in 2020.<sup>527</sup> Over the year, GCPEA collected three media reports of military use of schools by armed groups. GCPEA could not determine whether any of the reports were included in the UN's tally. These included:

- On September 27, 2020, an armed group allegedly established a camp in a school in Nanga Boguila subprefecture, Ouham prefecture, according to a local media source.<sup>528</sup>
- On October 24, 2020, in Nanga Boguila subprefecture, Ouham prefecture, an armed group reportedly occupied a school, after MINUSCA instructed the group to vacate another school in the vicinity.<sup>529</sup>

In 2021, the UN reported that several dozen schools had been occupied during the year.<sup>530</sup> Military occupation of schools was reported in the context of state forces and allied forces retaking towns and villages from non-state armed groups. In some cases, schools were used for several weeks or months. For example, in February 2021, the UN reported that, following election-related violence, 26 schools remained occupied by armed groups,<sup>531</sup> and that 13 schools were still being used in June 2021.<sup>532</sup> In addition, GCPEA identified five reports of military use of schools in 2021:

- According to media reports, on March 17, 2021, FACA, with support from other security personnel, allegedly retook the town of Nanga Boguila, Ouham prefecture, which had been occupied by a non-state armed group and proceeded to occupy several classrooms and the director's office of the local school.<sup>533</sup>
- According to media reports, two schools in Boda, Lobaye prefecture, were occupied by private security personnel in March and April 2021, affecting the education of around 2,000 children.<sup>534</sup>
- On March 11, 2021, the UN verified the occupation of a school by private security personnel in Ouaka prefecture.<sup>535</sup>
- On April 14, 2021, after FACA and private security personnel retook Batangafo, Ouham prefecture, from a non-state armed group, private security personnel allegedly occupied the main school of the subprefecture, according to local media.<sup>536</sup>

### Attacks on higher education

Between 2020 and 2021, GCPEA collected one report of an attack on higher education. No reported attacks on higher education were collected in the period covered by *Education under Attack 2020*. According to media reports, on April 3, 2020, students from the University of Bangui were protesting in Bangui to demand payment of their bursaries. Police arrested at least three students.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021: Events of 2020*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021), Central African Republic Chapter.

<sup>490</sup> "Central African Republic Humanitarian Situation Report - November - December 2020," UNICEF, December 31, 2020.

<sup>491</sup> "Central African Republic: facing assaults from the CPC coalition, the Security Council is considering a request to develop the mission mandate (République centrafricaine: face aux assauts de la coalition CPC, le Conseil de sécurité examine une demande d'aménagement du mandat de la Mission)," UN Security Council Press release, January 21, 2021.

<sup>492</sup> "Central African Republic Humanitarian Situation Report - November - December 2020," UNICEF, December 31, 2020.

<sup>493</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021: Events of 2020*, Central African Republic Chapter. Adrienne Surprenant, "In Central African Republic, disputed polls sparked a rebel offensive," *The New Humanitarian*, January 18, 2021.

<sup>494</sup> ACAPS, "Central African Republic: Conflict-led displacement resulting from electoral violence," ACAPS Briefing Note, February 19, 2021, p. 1.

<sup>495</sup> Pauline Bax, "Russia's Influence in the Central African Republic," International Crisis Group, December 3, 2021. UNICEF, "Central African Republic Humanitarian Situation Report - November - December 2020," December 31, 2020.

<sup>496</sup> United Nations, "Central African Republic: Rights experts concerned over 'Russian advisers' and close contacts with UN peacekeepers," UN News, March 31, 2021. United Nations, "Continued Attacks by Illegal Armed Groups in Central African Republic Thwarting Progress towards Implementing Peace Agreement, Special Representative Tells Security Council," UN Press Release, October 18, 2021.

<sup>497</sup> "Central African Republic: Situation Report, 4 January 2022," OCHA, December 14, 2021, p. 1. "Central African Republic Humanitarian Situation Report - Reporting Period: 01 January to 31 December 2021," UNICEF, February 7, 2022, p.1.

<sup>498</sup> ACAPS, "Central African Republic: Conflict-led displacement resulting from electoral violence," p. 1.

<sup>499</sup> "Central African Republic Regional Emergency Appeal (February 2021)," UNHCR, February 25, 2021, p. 1.

<sup>500</sup> "Central African Republic: Situation Report - Last updated: 16 Nov 2021," OCHA, November 16, 2021, p. 3.

<sup>501</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "On-the-record update about the humanitarian crisis in Central African Republic," NRC, February 17, 2021.

<sup>502</sup> "Central African Republic: Situation Report - Last updated: 16 Nov 2021," OCHA, November 16, 2021, p. 7.; "Central African Republic Humanitarian Situation Report - Reporting Period: 01 January to 31 December 2021," UNICEF, February 7, 2022, p.1.

<sup>503</sup> UN, "Central African Republic: new wave of violence puts education on hold for one in two children across the country," Joint statement by UN Humanitarian Coordinator Denise Brown and UNICEF Representative Fran Equiza, February 23, 2021. "UNICEF Central African Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 - January-February 2021," UNICEF, April 14, 2021, p.3.

<sup>504</sup> UN, "Central African Republic: new wave of violence puts education on hold for one in two children across the country," Joint statement by UN Humanitarian Coordinator Denise Brown and UNICEF Representative Fran Equiza, February 23, 2021. "UNICEF Central African Republic Humanitarian

ian Situation Report No. 1 - January-February 2021,” UNICEF, April 14, 2021, p.3.

<sup>505</sup> “Central African Republic: Situation Report - Last updated: 7 Jan 2021,” OCHA, February 22, 2021.

<sup>506</sup> “Central African Republic: Situation Report - Last updated: 7 Jan 2021,” OCHA, February 22, 2021.

<sup>507</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2020/994, October 12, 2020, para 73. “Central African Republic: Situation Report - Last updated: 5 Jan 2021,” OCHA, February 22, 2021.

<sup>508</sup> Internews, UNICEF, USAID, “Weekly bulletin on the verification of rumours and information. No. 08 of 03 Sept. 2020 (Bulletin hebdomadaire de vérification des rumeurs et informations. N°08 du 03 Sept. 2020),” September 3, 2020.

<sup>509</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/74/845-S/2020/525, June 9, 2020, para 36.

<sup>510</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020*, CAR chapter.

<sup>511</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/882),” October 15, 2021, para. 33.

<sup>512</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2021/146, February 16, 2021, para 66.

<sup>513</sup> United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), “Quarterly report - October-November-December 2020 (Rapport trimestriel - Octobre-Novembre-Décembre 2020),” paras. 66-67.

<sup>514</sup> *Corbeau News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN47344. Moïse Banafio, “CAR: Ndélé, fighting intensifies 5 kilometers away (RCA : Ndélé, les combats s’intensifient à 5 kilomètres.),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, March 29, 2020. *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, “CAR: 3R closes schools and prohibits exams in Niem (RCA : le 3R ferme les portes des écoles et interdit les examens à Niem),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, September 18, 2020.

<sup>515</sup> *Corbeau News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN47344. Moïse Banafio, “CAR: Ndélé, fighting intensifies 5 kilometers away (RCA : Ndélé, les combats s’intensifient à 5 kilomètres.),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, March 29, 2020.

<sup>516</sup> “CAR: 3R closes schools and prohibits exams in Niem (RCA : le 3R ferme les portes des écoles et interdit les examens à Niem),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, September 18, 2020.

<sup>517</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/882),” October 15, 2021, para. 33.

<sup>518</sup> MINUSCA, “Monthly Report: Analysis of the human rights situation September 2021 (Rapport Mensuel : Analyse de la situation des droits de l’homme Septembre 2021),” September 30, 2021, para. 33; MINUSCA, “Monthly Report: Analysis of the human rights situation October 2021 (Rapport Mensuel : Analyse de la situation des droits de l’homme octobre 2021),” October 31, 2021, para. 23; MINUSCA, “Monthly Report: Analysis of the human rights situation November 2021 (Rapport Mensuel : Analyse de la situation des droits de l’homme Novembre 2021),” November 30, 2021, para. 25.

<sup>519</sup> OHCHR, MINUSCA, “Public Report on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Central African Republic during the election period (Rapport Public Sur Les Violations Des Droits De l’homme Et Du Droit International Humanitaire En Republique Centrafricaine Durant La Periode Electorale),” August 4, 2021, paras. 113, 115.

<sup>520</sup> *Radio NdekeLuka*, “CAR-Bangui: the only school in Yassinda in the 4th arrondissement is threatened with closure after visit by CPC rebels (Centrafrique-Bangui: l’unique école de Yassinda dans le 4e arr. menacée de fermeture après le passage des rebelles de la CPC),” *A Bangui*, March 20, 2021.

<sup>521</sup> *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, “CAR: Batangafo, population denounces occupation of school by Russian mercenaries (RCA : Batangafo, les populations dénoncent l’occupation de l’école par les mercenaires russes),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, April 13, 2021. *Corbeau News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN48088.

<sup>522</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020*, CAR Chapter.

<sup>523</sup> *Corbeau News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN47323. “CAR: violent protest at colleges in Bangui in support of temporary teachers (RCA : violente manifestation dans les lycées à Bangui en appui aux professeurs vacataires.),” *Corbeau News*, March 2, 2020.

<sup>524</sup> *Corbeau News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN47331. “CAR: widespread disruptions in schools, Touadera traveling (RCA : pagailles générales dans les écoles, Touadera en voyage.),” *Corbeau News*, March 4, 2020.

<sup>525</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020*, CAR Chapter.

<sup>526</sup> Information received from a UN respondent on November 6, 2021.

<sup>527</sup> MINUSCA, “Human Rights Division Monthly Report - January 2021 (Division des Droits de l’Homme Rapport mensuel - Janvier 2021),” para 36. UN Security Council and General Assembly, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/75/873-S/2021/437, May 6, 2021, para. 29.

<sup>528</sup> *Corbeau News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID CEN47609. G Bobérang, “CAR: Panic in Nanga Boguila, 3R militiamen have occupied the town for several days, population in panic (RCA : panique à Nanga Boguila, les 3R occupent la ville depuis plusieurs jours, les populations paniquées),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, October 7, 2020.

<sup>529</sup> “CAR: Nanga Boguila, rebels erect barricades and occupy a local school (RCA : Nanga Boguila, les rebelles installent des barrières et occupent une école dans la localité),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, October 28, 2020.

<sup>530</sup> “Central African Republic Humanitarian Situation Report - Reporting Period: 01 January to 31 December 2021,” UNICEF, February 7, 2022, p.2.

<sup>531</sup> UN, “Central African Republic: new wave of violence puts education on hold for one in two children across the country,” Joint statement by UN Humanitarian Coordinator Denise Brown and UNICEF Representative Fran Equiza, February 23, 2021. “UNICEF Central African Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 - January-February 2021,” UNICEF, April 14, 2021, p.3.

<sup>532</sup> UN Security Council, “Children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2021/882, October 15,

2021, para. 35.

<sup>533</sup> Gisèle MOLOMA, “CAR: Nanga Boguila, Russian mercenaries occupy classrooms in the sub-prefectoral school, students’ parents are indignant (RCA : Nanga Boguila, les mercenaires russes occupent les salles de classe de l’école sous-préfectorale, les parents d’élèves s’indignent),” *Corbeaunews Centrafrique*, April 9, 2021.

<sup>534</sup> Adrienne Surprenant, “Central African troops and Russian mercenaries accused of abuses in anti-rebel offensive,” *The New Humanitarian*, April 29, 2021.

<sup>535</sup> OHCHR, MINUSCA, “Public Report on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Central African Republic during the election period (Rapport public sur les violations des droits de l’homme et du droit international humanitaire en République centrafricaine durant la période électorale),” August 4, 2021, para. 116.

<sup>536</sup> “CAR: Batangafo, population denounces occupation of school by Russian mercenaries (RCA : Batangafo, les populations dénoncent l’occupation de l’école par les mercenaires russes),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, April 13, 2021.

<sup>537</sup> Anselme Mbata, “CAR: Students on strike to demand payment of their bursary (Centrafrique : Les Étudiants en grève pour réclamer le paiement de leur bourse),” *Corbeau News Centrafrique*, April 3, 2020.