

# Central African Republic

## Conflict-led displacement resulting from electoral violence

### KEY FIGURES

240,000

PEOPLE INTERNALLY  
DISPLACED  
SINCE 15 DECEMBER

117,000

IDPS HAVE NOT  
YET RETURNED

110,000

REFUGEES:

92,000

IN DRC

7,400

IN CHAD

6,100

IN CAMEROON

4,300

IN REPUBLIC OF CONGO

### CRISIS OVERVIEW

On 15 December, six armed groups (3R, FPRC, MPC, UPC, and the Mokom and Ndomaté Anti-Balaka wings) formed the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) in Central African Republic (CAR) (RFI 20/12/2020). They initially launched an offensive to try and derail the 27 December elections, taking over towns and cities and generating displacement in the western half of the country as well as in central and southern regions. Their activity has continued since the general elections, however. On 13 January they attacked the outskirts of Bangui before being pushed back by Central African Armed Forces, MINUSCA peacekeepers, and Rwandan and Russian troops (DW 13/01/2021). Recently, as CAR armed forces move in, the CPC has left some of the localities that it had taken over. The CPC left Bangassou on 14 January, Boda on 25 January, Bouar on 9 February, and Beloko on 11 February (RFI 16/01/2021; RFI 25/01/2021; RFI 09/02/2021; RFI 11/02/2021).

Over 240,000 people have been internally displaced by the increase in violence since mid-December, including 117,000 people who remain displaced as their villages and towns are still unsafe. Nearly 110,000 refugees have fled to Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Chad, Cameroon, and Republic of Congo (OCHA last accessed 08/02/2021; UNHCR 16/02/2021).

New refugees are mostly arriving in areas that are already hosting CAR refugees from previous displacements. In these areas, the local population already has unmet needs. Beyond specific needs related to existing conditions in host areas, newly arrived refugees require protection assistance, especially in terms of child protection, sexual and gender-based violence, and documentation.

### HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

Humanitarian access is difficult in CAR because of poor road conditions and insecurity. The upcoming rainy season is likely to cut off road access to some refugee-hosting areas in DRC and deteriorate roads in CAR. Likouala department in Republic of Congo, which hosts arrivals from CAR, is still suffering from the effects of flooding from the second half of 2020.

The delivery of aid to affected areas in CAR has been delayed, and in some locations temporarily scaled back or suspended because of the outbreak of violence, although operations are now beginning to resume (ICRC 28/12/2020; The New Humanitarian 05/02/2021; The New Humanitarian 15/02/2021).

The route between Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon) and Bangui – which more than 80% of the country's imports transit through – has been blocked because of insecurity since mid-December. On 8 February, a convoy of 14 trucks – nine from the WFP and the rest containing MINUSCA equipment – was able to reach Bangui under MINUSCA escort (Al Jazeera 08/02/2021; The New Humanitarian 05/02/2021).

### About this report

This report aims to give an overview of internal displacement flows in CAR and refugee arrivals from CAR in neighbouring countries, as well as insights on existing vulnerabilities and constraints faced by humanitarians. The information presented is based on publicly available information at the time of writing.

## CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

### SITUATION OVERVIEW

Over 240,000 people were internally displaced by the latest outbreak of violence in mid-December. 117,000 remain displaced as insecurity prevents them from returning. Most are hiding in poor conditions in the forest or fields around their villages, and they occasionally return to gather supplies and belongings. The rest of the internally displaced population are hosted in schools, churches, with host families, or are staying near MINUSCA bases (OCHA 08/02/2021).

At least 25 violent incidents have been reported since the outbreak of violence between 15 December–27 January. These incidents were mostly reported in Bangui, as well as in Haute-Kotto, Lobaye, Mambéré-Kadéï, Mbomou, Nana-Grébizi, Nana-Mambéré, Ombella-M'Poko, Ouaka, Ouham, and Ouham-Pendé prefectures, covering the western half of the country, along with parts of the centre and the south (REACH, UNICEF 27/01/2021).

Protection concerns have been raised among the newly displaced population, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), the presence of unaccompanied and separated children, and forced recruitment. The presence of armed groups in IDP camps poses additional protection risks. Food, basic medical supplies, WASH, household items, and shelter are the other key humanitarian needs for displaced people, according to initial assessments (OCHA 03/02/2021; UNHCR 05/02/2021).

### PRE-EXISTING VULNERABILITIES

A large proportion of the population in CAR is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of conflict and other disasters, and faces needs across all sectors. 2.8 million people – out of a total population of 4.8 million – were already in need of humanitarian assistance prior to the outbreak of election-related violence (OCHA 20/10/2020). 623,000 people were already internally displaced and 627,000 refugees from CAR were already present in other countries (OCHA 17/11/2020).

**Protection:** Those affected by violence are in need of protection assistance, including psychosocial support, child protection, SGBV support, and access to documentation. An average of one SGBV incident per hour is reported in the country, although the actual number of incidents is likely to be higher – as only 42% of the country is covered by the GBV information management system (OCHA 03/02/2021).

**WASH and health:** 40% of surveyed families in displaced sites had limited access to clean

water. Unmet needs in WASH and other sectors make the population more vulnerable to endemic diseases (OCHA 20/10/2020).

**Food:** 1.6 million people – 38% of the analysed population – in prefectures affected by electoral violence and subsequent displacement are facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels of food insecurity during the September 2020–April 2021 period, including 324,000 in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) conditions. This is projected to increase to 1.9 million people facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse conditions during May–August 2021, partly because of the lean season (the period between harvests). The actual figures could eventually surpass this projection, as they were calculated before the outbreak of electoral violence. Food security needs in CAR are mainly driven by insecurity and displacement – which prevent the population from accessing markets and hamper agricultural production – as well as the lingering socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 restrictions (IPC 15/10/2020). Initial restrictions were implemented in March 2020, including the closure of the country's borders (except for goods, humanitarian aid, and humanitarian workers), restrictions on gatherings, and a ban on travel between Bangui and the rest of the country (Radio Ndeke Luka 27/03/2020). Only minimal social distancing and mask requirements remain in place, as well as potential testing and quarantine of certain arrivals at Bangui airport (GardaWorld 21/01/2021).

The blockade of the Garoua-Boulaï route by the CPC has resulted in food shortages and higher food prices across the country. The increase in price of an average food basket ranged between 13% in Bria town and 60% in Bouar town during January 2021. In Bangui, Bimbo, and Bégoua markets, the prices of rice and wheat flour doubled, and the price of meat increased by 64% (WFP 02/02/2021).

### HUMANITARIAN AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

The road blockade has also affected humanitarian operations, and 500 trucks carrying humanitarian aid and 1,100 other transport trucks were left stranded at the Garoua-Boulaï border (OCHA 03/02/2021; Le Monde 13/01/2021). On 18 January, a truck driver was killed and two others were wounded when a convoy of 30 trucks was attacked near the town of Baboua shortly after departing from Garoua-Boulaï (Radio Ndeke Luka 20/01/2021). CAR authorities announced that the road is now open for transit in both directions, following the arrival of the first convoy in Bangui since the beginning of the blockade (TV5 Monde 12/02/2021). The CPC has stated that it will maintain a blockade on non-humanitarian transit (RFI 09/02/2021).

CAR is one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarians. There was an average of more than one incident per day in 2020: 424 violent incidents involving humanitarian workers were reported – a 39% increase from 2019 – and three humanitarian workers were killed. Incidents in December 2020 (59) were nearly double the monthly average. 66 incidents were

reported in January 2021, even higher than in December. The most affected subprefectures were Bangassou (14 incidents), Bambari (8), and Kaga-Bandoro (8). The vast majority of reported incidents in January (80.3%) were burglaries and robberies (OCHA 04/01/2021; OCHA 05/02/2021). As well as insecurity, humanitarian access in CAR is also constrained by intimidations, interference with activities, and illegal taxation by armed groups, which are not always reported because of fear of judgement by the organisation's hierarchy or simply because they have become routine (OCHA 20/10/2020; OCHA 09/11/2020).

The rainy season, which further damages the country's poor road infrastructure, usually starts in April and peaks between July and October (FEWS NET 12/2013).

All of these constraints mean that access to some areas is only possible by air – mostly in the northern and eastern parts of the country – although other localities can also be affected depending on changes in road conditions and armed group movements (OCHA 20/10/2020; Logistics Cluster 03/02/2021).

## REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

### SITUATION OVERVIEW

As at 4 February, an estimated 92,000 refugees from CAR had arrived in at least 40 localities of Nord-Ubangi (35,300), Sud-Ubangi (10,000), and Bas-Uélé (46,600) provinces since mid-December, primarily following attacks in CAR on Damara and Bangassou towns on 2 and 3 January, and on the outskirts of Bangui on 13 January. Refugees are either hosted by the local community or are living in makeshift shelters along the Ubangi river – the border between CAR and DRC. Assistance in WASH and health is crucial as cases of malaria, respiratory tract infections, and diarrhoea have been reported among the new arrivals. Food, shelter, and psychosocial assistance needs have also been reported, as well as education needs for displaced children (UNHCR 16/01/2021; UNHCR 05/02/2021; UNHCR 22/01/2021). Negative coping mechanisms such as open defecation and taking food from the local communities' crop fields have been reported (Radio Okapi 01/02/2021).

### PRE-EXISTING VULNERABILITIES

DRC was already hosting 171,000 refugees prior to the most recent arrival of refugees, including 91,600 in Nord-Ubangi, 38,900 in Sud-Ubangi, and 40,100 in Bas-Uélé. Most refugees (100,600) live in rural localities, outside of camps or formal sites (UNHCR 30/11/2020).

Host communities are often unable to meet their own needs, particularly healthcare – as

health services are lacking. Authorities in Yakoma territory (in Nord-Ubangi) have also reported an increase in food prices resulting from the influx of new arrivals (Radio Okapi 05/02/2021). In some areas, refugees outnumber the local population, placing additional strain on limited resources. Following the attacks on Damara and Bangassou, at least 15,000 people arrived in Ndu, a town of only 3,500 with the number of refugees now reaching 17,000 (UNHCR 08/01/2021; OCHA 18/01/2021; UNHCR 22/01/2021).

The three host provinces of Nord-Ubangi, Sud-Ubangi, and Bas-Uélé are also experiencing the impacts of DRC's complex humanitarian crisis, namely population movements, acute malnutrition, acute food insecurity, disease outbreaks, and protection concerns. 39,000 people, including refugees and both host and non-host communities, are in need of aid in Bas-Uélé; 151,700 in Nord-Ubangi; and 318,400 in Sud-Ubangi (OCHA 01/01/2021).

33,600 people in Bas-Uélé are projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse acute food insecurity levels during the January–June 2021 period; 162,600 in Nord-Ubangi; and 453,200 in Sud-Ubangi. At least 18% of the total population in these three provinces are therefore in need of food assistance. In reality, this figure will probably be actually higher as the classification takes into account food availability stemming from humanitarian aid (IPC 30/09/2020).

The population along the CAR side of the Ubangi river border is particularly vulnerable to the spread of disease, especially during the rainy season. 63% of people surveyed in Mobaye subprefecture reported at least one family member dying from measles in the past three months. An evaluation in August 2020 along the Ubangi river corridor found that over 60% of children under five were not vaccinated against measles (OCHA 20/10/2020).

The spillover of armed group activity across the river border from CAR threatens both refugees and the local population, especially since new arrivals have so far mostly remained along the river border (UNHCR 05/02/2021). On 18 January, six fishermen were kidnapped from an islet on the Ubangi river in Nord-Ubangi and held for ransom in CAR, an action that the local population and provincial authorities have attributed to members of an armed group from CAR. According to the local population, this was the first kidnapping incident in the area, although robberies by CAR armed groups have occurred in the past (RFI 25/01/2021).

### HUMANITARIAN AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

There were no reported security incidents against humanitarians in Nord-Ubangi, Sud-Ubangi, or Bas-Uélé between January–November 2020. Access constraints in the context of this latest refugee influx are mostly related to poor road infrastructure, remoteness, and the upcoming rainy season which threatens to render road access to some refugee locations impossible (UNHCR 05/02/2021; UNHCR 22/01/2021). Administrative issues have been reported as affecting humanitarian access in DRC, although it is unclear if these concerns will play a

role in the CAR refugee response (OCHA 01/01/2021).

Electoral violence in CAR has once again halted the repatriation of CAR refugees from DRC, which was restarted in November 2020 following border closures resulting from COVID-19. Areas that were previously deemed safe for return are now threatened or controlled by armed groups (UNHCR 22/01/2021).

## REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN CHAD

### SITUATION OVERVIEW

Around 7,400 new refugees had arrived in Nya Pendé department (Logone Oriental region) as at 12 February (UNHCR 16/02/2021). They fled the electoral violence as well as fighting between armed groups over the taxation rights of mining sites in Markounda and surrounding areas. Refugees must undergo a 14-day quarantine once in Chad to prevent the spread of COVID-19. There are two quarantine centres located in the Goré and Dosseye transit centres. Refugees who have already been in the border area for more than two weeks are directly transferred to Doholo camp. 10% of registered arrivals consider return a possibility should the security situation allow it. Needs assessments are underway, although shelter, food, non-food items, and protection assistance are already being provided (UNHCR 05/01/2021; UNHCR 01/02/2021).

### PRE-EXISTING VULNERABILITIES

Southern Chad was already home to 96,700 refugees and 69,300 Chadian returnees from CAR in Logone Oriental, Mandoul, Moyen-Chari, and Salamat regions prior to the latest arrival of refugees. This included 45,800 refugees and 21,700 returnees in Nya Pendé department. New arrivals will eventually be transferred to the Doholo camp, where 6,200 refugees are already present. The construction of 1,200 new emergency shelters is underway to increase the camp's capacity (UNHCR 30/11/2020; UNHCR 01/02/2021; OCHA 08/02/2021).

Returnees in some sites in southern Chad are facing a severe deterioration in humanitarian conditions resulting from a lack of humanitarian assistance. Insufficient WASH infrastructure at the Kobiteye and Danamadja sites (Nya Pendé department) has led to open defecation becoming common practice. Children are not being enrolled in school, and a lack of financial means has left people without access to health services. Some returnees have reportedly pretended to be recent CAR refugees to receive some form of assistance, and others have left the sites (OCHA 05/02/2021).

236,000 people in Logone Oriental were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020, including 64,000 people facing life-threatening conditions and 36,000 people who were not able to meet their basic needs. The main priorities in the region are shelter, WASH, education, protection, and food security (OCHA 12/02/2020).

60,800 people in Logone Oriental faced Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food insecurity levels and 4,600 faced Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels during the October–December 2020 period. This is expected to rise to 85,500 people facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels and remain the same for Emergency (IPC Phase 4) for the June–August 2021 period, which corresponds with the lean season. This means that at least 8% of the region's population will be in need of food assistance (RPCA 12/11/2020; FEWS NET 12/2013).

### HUMANITARIAN AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Humanitarian organisations in Logone Oriental have reported humanitarian constraints mostly resulting from poor road infrastructure and environmental constraints, but also from movement restrictions, military operations, and interference. Certain routes in Chad have specific requirements for humanitarian travel as a result of insecurity. The route heading east from Goré, through which Danamadja camp is accessed, requires at least two vehicles. All other routes in Logone Oriental are accessible without restrictions (OCHA 12/2020; OCHA 30/11/2020).

Almost all humanitarian actors were forced to withdraw from the Kobiteye and Danamadja sites as funding ran out, and the COVID-19 pandemic prevented monitoring, alerting, and advocacy activities from taking place. The WFP last provided food assistance to the sites in August 2020 (OCHA 05/02/2021). A lack of resources for cash-based transfers to CAR refugees and returnees was reported in January 2021 (WFP 19/01/2021).

## REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN CAMEROON

### SITUATION OVERVIEW

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6,100 refugees fleeing electoral violence in western CAR have arrived in Cameroon – 90% in the areas surrounding Garoua-Boulai (East region) and the other 10% further south near Kentzou. 1,227 refugees had been transferred to the Gado camp (Lom-et-Djérem department) as at 10 February (UNHCR 16/02/2021). Some crossed through irregular crossing points and have settled directly within host communities (UNHCR 09/02/2021).

### PRE-EXISTING VULNERABILITIES

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There were more than 26,000 CAR refugees at the Gado camp prior to the latest arrival of new refugees, including 3,812 with specific needs (vulnerable women, children, the elderly, single parents, separated or unaccompanied children, people with disabilities, people with serious health conditions, and people in need of SGBV, legal, or physical protection assistance). Existing schools do not have the means to take in all of the children in the camp – who make up 57% of the refugee population – and parents do not have the financial means to pay for school supplies. Only 53% of eligible children were enrolled in primary school and 20% in secondary school according to indicators from December 2020. Access to health services is insufficient. Livelihoods are not enough to cover living expenses, and vocational training for young refugees was halted because of COVID-19. Since May 2020, cash-based transfers have only covered 50% of monthly food needs, down from the 70% that were provided since at least December 2017 (UNHCR 25/01/2021, UNHCR 15/05/2017).

Beyond Gado camp, Cameroon hosts over 316,800 CAR refugees in the East and Adamawa regions (UNHCR 31/12/2020). 70% are in host communities, where access to social services is limited. Protection concerns such as police harassment, child marriage, SGBV, and child labour have been reported. Refugees and host communities are also vulnerable to the spread of diseases such as cholera, measles, and haemorrhagic fevers because of poor access to drinking water, lack of sanitation, and insufficient hygiene practices (OCHA 23/06/2020; WHO 07/02/2021).

### HUMANITARIAN AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

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Although criminality in the Adamawa and East regions – including kidnapping incidents along the border with CAR – is reported, it has not affected humanitarian access (OCHA 23/06/2020). Gado camp is already over its planned capacity of 26,000 people (DW 25/01/2021).

## REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN REPUBLIC OF CONGO

### SITUATION OVERVIEW

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Around 4,300 CAR refugees had arrived in Republic of Congo's Likouala department as at 12 February, and are hosted in the local community. Information on their needs is not yet available (UNHCR 16/02/2021).

### PRE-EXISTING VULNERABILITIES

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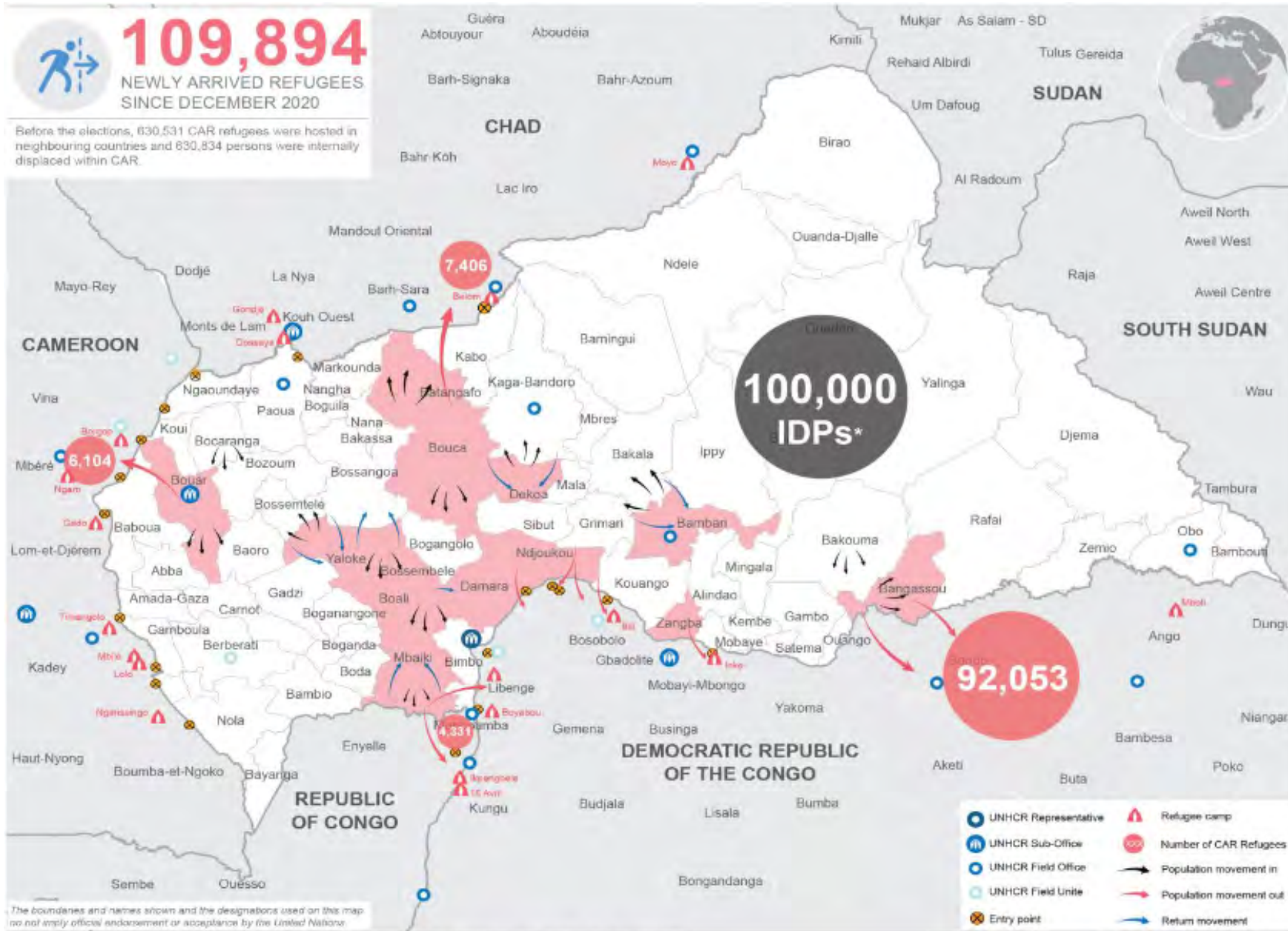
Likouala department was already hosting 27,000 refugees from CAR and 21,000 refugees from DRC. The department is situated along the Ubangi river corridor, where DRC's last Ebola outbreak was active between June–November 2020. The risk of disease outbreaks in Likouala is heightened because of limited WASH infrastructure and seasonal floods (April–October) (UNICEF 14/12/2020; Britannica accessed 16/02/2021). 180,000 people were affected by floods in northern Republic of Congo during the second half of 2020, and continue to be affected despite receding water levels (RFI 27/12/2020; WFP 08/02/2021).

### HUMANITARIAN AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

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Access to remote areas in Likouala is difficult, even outside of the flood seasons. Humanitarian aid is mainly delivered by boat (OCHA 23/01/2020). It is unclear if this lack of access also includes refugee-hosting locations.

# Internal displacement and refugee flows since December 2020



Source: UNHCR 16/02/2021