

Central African Republic

Violations	International Data 2022	Outcomes of the research (2022-first months of 2023)
Killings and maiming	80	80
Recruitment	134 (111 boys, 23 girls), between the ages of 7 and 17 recruited and used by several armed groups 40 boys served in combat roles 46 children were used by other security personnel	134
Sexual violence	76 cases (75 girls and 1 boys)	72 cases against girls
Abduction	79	77 children
Attacks against schools and hospitals	7 attacks against schools 14 schools used by security personnel 11 attacks against hospitals	7 attacks against schools 14 schools used by security personnel 11 attacks against hospitals
Denial of humanitarian access	50 cases	50 cases

Challenges met during the research

Typology	Challenges	Comment
Quantitative	Data collection	The challenge of obtaining local statistics on the violations against children in armed conflict in DRC underscores the pervasive cultural barriers and the reluctance of individuals to discuss said violations openly. The cultural context, deeply rooted in traditions and norms, often inhibits the willingness of community members to come forward and report violations. Fears of social stigma, reprisals, and the potential disruption of community harmony contribute to a climate of silence, making it difficult to access accurate and comprehensive local statistics. Efforts to address these challenges must involve culturally sensitive approaches and community engagement strategies to foster an environment where reporting and addressing violations are seen as imperative for the well-being of children and the community. The complexities associated with conflict, including security risks, displacement, create substantial obstacles in obtaining accurate and up-to-date statistics.

Qualitative	Cross reference and verification of data	Overcoming the challenges regarding the verifications of the data requires a multidimensional approach involving collaboration between local communities, humanitarian organizations, and international entities to ensure the protection and well-being of affected populations, especially children.
Quantitative	Lack of a comparison between statics given by international organization and local institutions	A database of international and local data, easily accessible, could be very useful to understand the local situations. International community should invest on this project.

1. Country analysis

Situated in the heart of Africa and devoid of coastal access, the Central African Republic (CAR) spans an area of 623,000 km² with a sparse population.¹ Despite its wealth in natural resources, including 470 mineral occurrences with notable potential in oil,

¹ For this section, see also: Auzias, D. Labourdette, J.P.(2009). *République centrafricaine*. ND ed. Paris: Nouvelles éditions de l'Université; Grootaers, J.L. (2007). *Ubangi: Art and Cultures from the African Heartland*. Brussels: Mercatorfonds; O'Toole, T.(1986). *The Central African Republic: The Continent's Hidden Heart*. Profiles: Nations of Contemporary Africa. Boulder, CO: Westview; Saulnier, P.(1997) *Le Centrafrique: Entre mythe et réalité*. Études africaines. Paris: Larmattan; Woodfork, J. (2006). *Culture and Customs of the Central African Republic*. Westport, CT: Greenwood; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, State of Commodity Dependence 2023, New York.

gold, and diamonds, it stands as one of the world's poorest and most fragile nations. The country has grappled with crises for over two decades, marked by the seizure of power by Séléka in 2013 and a recent crisis initiated by a rebel coalition in December 2020.

1.1. Conflict

Since achieving independence in 1960, CAR has faced with decades of violence and instability, marked by six coups. Since the 2003 coup by François Bozizé, a substantial portion of the country, especially the northern regions, has been under the control of rebel groups. In 2004, clashes started between the government and the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (*Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement* -UFDR) which concluded on 13 April 2007 with the signature of a peace agreement in Birao. Despite attempts for disarmament and to establish peace, instability and attacks persisted. As the conflict concluded, the Séléka, a primarily Muslim armed groups, launched an offensive against the government in December 2012, swiftly capturing the northern and central regions before seizing Bangui, the capital, in March 2013. Although the rebel leader, Michel Djotodia, assumed the presidency and attempted to disband Séléka forces, not all fighters complied. Responding to brutality by Séléka forces, coalitions of Christian fighters known as "anti-Balaka" emerged, conducting retaliatory violence against Séléka members, introducing a religious dimension to the conflict. In September 2013, anti-Balaka forces initiated widespread attacks against the civilian population, displacing tens of thousands of Muslim civilians. Despite the official dissolution of Séléka, ex-members launched counterattacks, thrusting the country into a chaotic state of violence and a humanitarian crisis. Since the resurgence of conflict in 2013, thousands have lost their lives, and the number of refugees has surged to

750,000, with most seeking refuge in neighbouring Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, while an additional 500,000 have become internally displaced (Global Conflict Tracker 2023). Due to the severity of the crisis, in April 2014, the UN Security Council – acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter - established the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), integrating African Union and French forces. MINUSCA's mandate includes a) protection of civilians; (b) support for the political process and key elements of the transition, including the restoration of State authority and its extension throughout the territory; (c) creation of security conditions conducive to the delivery of principled humanitarian assistance and the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of internally displaced persons and refugees; (d) promotion and protection of human rights; (e) promotion of a national dialogue, mediation and reconciliation at all levels; and (f) support for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed elements, with specific attention to children, as well as community violence-reduction programmes. However, numerous attacks have been directed at UN peacekeepers and humanitarian workers, resulting in 176 peacekeepers killed since the mission's inception (Global Conflict Tracker, 2023).

Notwithstanding initial optimism following President Touadera's election in spring 2016, the crisis escalated. A *de facto* territorial partition briefly quelled Muslim-Christian clashes but infighting among ex-Séléka factions intensified. Although the government retained control of the capital Bangui, most armed groups resisted President Touadera's efforts at regional pacification through disarmament, leaving the government powerless beyond the capital. Lawlessness in the country facilitated the thriving of armed groups, resulting in increased violence in central, western, and eastern provinces. The conflict severely impacted the economy,

debilitating the private sector and pushing nearly 75 % of the population into poverty (Global Conflict Tracker, 2023).

In 2017, conflict escalation prompted aid agencies to withdraw, leading MINUSCA to bolster its troop numbers. A peace agreement was signed in June 2017. However, armed groups, including ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka militias, alongside numerous local factions, continue to openly operate, controlling significant portions of the country. In July 2018, MINUSCA and government forces launched an operation to disarm a militia group in Bangui's PK5 neighbourhood, a predominantly Muslim enclave in the mostly Christian city. Rumours about disarming all Muslims, leaving them vulnerable to attacks by armed Christian groups, sparked clashes, expanding violence beyond PK5. From 2018 to 2020, sporadic clashes persisted between the government and fragmented armed groups, with militants targeting civilians, particularly at places of worship. On 6 February 2019, the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR-RCA) was signed. However, most of its provisions were not implemented, and human rights groups and UN agencies reported war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both ex-Séléka forces and anti-Balaka groups.

In late 2020, former President Bozizé's returned to the country but the Constitutional Court rejected his candidature in the upcoming presidential election. In December 2020, six armed groups, including ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka, formed the Patriots for Change (*Coalition des patriotes pour le changement -CPC*)², a coalition to disrupt the general elections. Despite clashes, President Touadera claimed victory, but the opposition contested the result, leading to

² The Coalition of Patriots for Change (French: *Coalition des patriotes pour le changement - CPC*) is a coalition of major rebel groups created in 2020 to disrupt the 2020–21 general election.

a CPC attack on the capital in January 2021. Government forces, supported by MINUSCA, Rwandan soldiers, and Wagner Group mercenaries, repelled the rebels. While government-aligned forces have made slow progress since 2021, rebels still control many northern and eastern areas. In early 2023, CPC rebels launched new attacks, raising fears of intensified fighting. While some progress has been made in implementing the 2019 peace agreement, challenges in disarmament and reintegration persist. A July 2023 referendum removing presidential term limits has been criticized as a farce, allowing President Touadera, in power since 2016, to run indefinitely (Global Conflict Tracker, 2023).

1.2. Post-conflict situation

Concerns persist about economic growth, the rule of law, and political stability, escalating violence and a deteriorating humanitarian crisis. With a population of around 6.1 million the Central African Republic ranks among the lowest in human capital and development indices, 188 out of 191 countries in 2022 (World Bank 2023). Weak institutions, limited access to basic services, inadequate infrastructure, widespread gender-based violence (GBV), and societal erosion characterize the country. Although its substantial agricultural potential and expansive forests, the population has yet to gain the associated benefits (World Bank, 2023). The country faces fragility due to factors such as a lack of social cohesion, political power concentration, social and regional disparities, elite mismanagement of natural resources, and persistent insecurity fuelled by regional conflicts.

The peace agreement signed in 2019, involving 14 armed groups, continues to guide efforts toward long-term peace, despite the withdrawal of armed groups linked to the CPC in December 2020. In the political realm, the International Conference on the Great

Lakes Region (ICGLR) progressed in preparing for the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) of CPC combatants. The dissolution of four armed groups in December 2022 and the relocation of Bozizé, former president and head of the CPC, in early March 2023 are expected to contribute to peace and stability. Dialogue with remaining armed groups is crucial for advancing the DDRR program. However, gains remain delicate as armed groups persist in targeting the civilian population.

The political climate remains polarized, marked by tensions with the international community due to geopolitical shifts. Opposition members, particularly those contrasting the constitutional referendum held on 30 July 2023, and various civil society actors frequently accuse pro-government youth groups of intimidation. Approximately 71% of the population lives below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day, adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP). The humanitarian situation in the country is deteriorating, with the UN Humanitarian Coordinator projecting that 56% of the population will require humanitarian assistance and protection in 2023, marking a 10% increase from 2022 (World Bank, 2023). The country faces alarming health statistics, including one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates at 882 per 100,000 live births. The under-five child mortality rate is the sixth highest globally, with 116 out of every 1,000 children succumbing to mortality (World Bank 2023). Additionally, the country exhibits one of the world's highest fertility rates, with an average of six births per woman, while the average life expectancy for both men and women is just 53 years. The education indicators are distressingly low. The expected length of schooling is 5.3 years for boys, compared to a mere 3.8 years for girls. The quality of primary education is subpar, and access to secondary education is limited, particularly for girls (World Bank, 2023).

Insecurity and ongoing violence created a hostile environment for women and girls. Sexual violence remains a threat for women and girls, particularly for those who are internally displaced. According to the 2021 Human Development Report, the country ranks 159 out of 162 countries with a gender inequality index of 0.680. Women are underrepresented in decision-making and suffer one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. These disparities contribute to elevated rates of gender-based violence (GBV), posing a significant barrier to the full participation of women in social and economic life. Empowering women is deemed crucial for the country's development. Although CAR has pledged adherence to gender equality provisions in the law, implementation remains feeble, leaving women and girls devoid of adequate protection. Widespread violence against women is evident, with 11,000 reported incidents annually, 74% of which involve children (World Bank, 2023).

The country continues to struggle with a humanitarian crisis, with over a million displaced by violence, a high mortality rate, flooding affecting over 100,000 people, and reported cases of gender-based violence. Moreover, the conflict in Sudan has led to an influx of over 14,000 refugees to northeaster of the country, an area largely outside of government control. Aid workers regularly face violence, complicating efforts to provide assistance to the population.

1.3. Implementation of human rights

The civilian population in the Central African Republic has been exposed to daily abuses and violence from armed groups, defence and security forces, private military, and security personnel for decades. Women, girls and children are most affected by conflict and gender-based violence has reached alarming proportions in

the country. Widespread impunity remains a major challenge. Significant human rights issues include credible reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings by the government; forced disappearances by the government; torture by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious abuses in the context of an internal conflict, including killing of civilians, enforced disappearances, torture and physical abuse or punishment, unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers, and other conflict-related abuses by armed groups; restrictions on free expression and media, including the existence of criminal libel laws; serious government corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence; and laws criminalizing consensual same-sex conduct between adults.

The government took steps to investigate and prosecute government officials for alleged human rights abuses and corruption, including in the security forces. Nevertheless, a climate of impunity and a lack of access to legal services remained obstacles to citizens' ability to obtain formal justice.

Globally, there has been some progress in advancing women's rights, but the country still faces challenges in achieving gender equality. Notably, 61% of women aged 20–24 was married or in a union before the age of 18. The adolescent birth rate is 229 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 as of 2009, up from 132.9 per 1,000 in 2003, posing risks to maternal and child health. Women of reproductive age often encounter barriers to their sexual and reproductive health and rights, with only 27.6% having their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods in 2019 (UN Women 2023). In 2018, 20.9% of women aged 15-49 reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months (UN Women, 2023). As of February 2021, only 8.6% of parliamentary seats were held by women.

As of December 2020, only 27.8% of indicators needed to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender perspective were available in the Central African Republic (UN Women, 2023). Critical areas such as unpaid care and domestic work, key labour market indicators, including the unemployment rate and gender pay gaps, and information and communications technology skills faced significant data gaps. Moreover, various areas, including gender and poverty, physical and sexual harassment, women's access to assets (such as land), and gender and the environment, lacked comparable methodologies for regular monitoring. Addressing these gender data gaps is crucial for fulfilling gender-related SDG commitments.

Domestic abuse, rape, and sexual slavery of women and girls by several armed rebel groups continued to threaten security, as did the use of sexual violence as a deliberate tactic of conflict. Attackers enjoyed broad impunity. Nearly one-quarter of girls and women were subjected to FGM/C, with variations according to ethnicity and region. One percent of girls ages 10 to 14 were mutilated. Both the prevalence of FGM/C and support for the practice appeared to be decreasing, according to 2018 data, the most recent available (U.S. Department State, 2023).

Children's rights have been profoundly impacted by years of conflict, political instability, and economic challenges. Despite efforts to address the rights of children, numerous obstacles persist, ranging from armed conflicts and displacement to issues related to education, healthcare, and protection. Currently, children are exposed to violence, forced labour, and psychological trauma, hampering their physical and emotional well-being. Access to education remains a significant challenge, with over half a million children between the ages of 3 and 17 out of school or at risk of dropping out due to insufficient resources, lack of qualified teachers, adequate schooling structures, and security concerns. The

2013 crisis further disrupted educational systems. Children face barriers to adequate healthcare, resulting in high infant mortality rates and limited access to essential services. Malnutrition, preventable diseases, and inadequate maternal healthcare contribute to child health challenges.

Education is compulsory from 6 to 15 years and is free of charge, but students have to pay for items such as books, supplies and transportation. The World Bank has estimated that 30% of children did not attend primary school and 22% did not attend secondary school, with girls having reduced and unequal access to education compared to boys. Very few indigenous Ba'aka children attend primary school and there is no significant government efforts to increase the enrolment of Ba'aka children. In school This notable discrepancy shows that indigenous Central African children and girls often have a reduced access to their right to education (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

Even before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant proportion of schools were closed due to conflict, with UNICEF quoting that 15% of schools were closed at the outset of 2020. All schools went on to be closed from April to September 2020 due to the pandemic, affecting almost a million children. SOS Children's Villages reported that even when schools re-opened, attendance rates are extremely low with around just 41% of girls and 62% of boys attending primary school, whilst only a fraction of these children go on to complete their primary education. Access to education for children living in areas particularly affected by conflict is heavily reduced and few children are able to attend school (SOS Children's Villages, 2020). Indeed, attacks against schools and the military use of schools continue to be reported (Gutierrez, 2020). Discrimination also exists against the Mbororo minority, as well as the forest dwelling indigenous Ba'aka people (who constitute around 1 to 2% of the population). They suffer disproportionately

from civic disorder in the north, and, since they are often seen as 'foreign' due to their transnational migratory patterns, Mbororo people can face discrimination in accessing government services. The Ba'aka people are habitually excluded from decisions affecting their lands, culture, traditions, and natural resources. They experience social and economic discrimination and exploitation, which the government does little to prevent. The Ba'aka, including children, can be coerced into agricultural and domestic labour, and are even sometimes considered to be slaves by members of other local ethnic groups. It appears that they are effectively treated as second-class citizens who are often dehumanised and excluded from mainstream society (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Around 61% of children under 5 years old have their births registered, helping to uphold these children's right to identity (UNICEF, 2020). Children derive citizenship by birth in the national Central African Republic territory or from one, or both, parents. Birth registration could be difficult and less likely to occur in regions with little government presence. Parents did not always register births immediately. Although most children's births were registered, unregistered children face restrictions on access to education and other social services (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

Child labour is common in many sectors of the economy, especially in rural areas. Local and displaced children as young as 7 years old frequently perform agricultural work, including harvesting and helping to gather items for sale at markets. Children often worked as domestic workers, fishermen, and in mines, often in dangerous conditions. Although the nation's mining code also prohibits child labour, children engage in the worst forms of child labour in diamond fields, transporting and washing gravel as well as mining gold, digging holes, and carrying heavy loads, in violation of their rights (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

2. Level of adequacy to international law

The Central African Republic has demonstrated a significant level of international commitment by ratifying several key international conventions and treaties that address human rights, discrimination, torture, and the protection of vulnerable categories of people. CAR has ratified a number of international human right instruments, including :

- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT);
- Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (CAT-OP);
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR);
- Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED);
- Interstate communication procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED, Art.32);
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD);
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR);
- Convention on the Rights of the Child: Signature on 30 Jul 1990 (CRC);
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-AC);

- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OP-SC);
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (U.N. Treaty Body Database, 2023).

The country is not, however, a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

As the first African country to ratify ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the Central African Republic set an example for others to follow, highlighting the importance of recognizing and safeguarding the rights of indigenous and tribal communities within the framework of international labour standards. Thereby contributing to the global effort to promote inclusivity, cultural preservation, and the well-being of these distinct groups within the nation, demonstrating commitment to upholding the rights of all communities recognising the unique cultural, social, and economic characteristics of each of them.

CAR ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 3 October 2001 and referred the situation in its territory since 1 July 2002. The ICC therefore may exercise its jurisdiction over crimes under the Rome Statute committed on the territory of CAR or by its nationals from 1 July 2002 onwards. In May 2007, the ICC Prosecutor opened a first investigation into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in 2002-2003. A second investigation focuses on alleged crimes committed during the armed conflict which involved CAR government forces, Séléka rebel armed groups, and anti-Balaka rebel armed groups from August 2012 to present. Several proceedings issued from the investigations and currently

two cases are at the trial stage before the ICC for alleged crimes committed during the period 2013-2014 by both Séléka and anti-Balaka groups (ICC website, 2023).

3. National legislation

The preamble to the Constitution adopted in 2016 reaffirms the State adherence to all International Conventions ratified, notably those concerning the prohibition of all forms of discrimination against women, the protection of the rights of the child and those related to the autochthonous and tribal peoples. The Constitution explicitly prohibits violence against women and girls, whilst national legislation criminalises the procurement, performance, arrangement or assistance of acts of female genital mutilation. There appears to be a broad lack of enforcement of these laws, however, with no serious crimes prosecuted since 2013 and many groups having carried out sexual violence with impunity. Article 7 of the Constitution recognises that the protection of the woman and of the child against violence and insecurity, exploitation and moral, intellectual and physical neglect is an obligation of the State to be assured by the appropriate measures and institutions. It also recognises that children born outside of marriage have the same rights to public assistance as legitimate children and that natural children, legally recognized, have the same rights as legitimate children. In accordance with article 9 of the Constitution, parents have the obligation to provide education and instruction to their children until the age of sixteen (16) years at least.

There exists an established national legal framework for the protection of child rights.

National law criminalizes parental abuse of children younger than 15. The Mixed Unit for the Repression of Violence against Wom-

en and the Protection of Children investigated 2,093 cases of child abuse between June 2017 and 31 August 2019 (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

National law prohibits discrimination against disabled people but does not specify other forms of disabilities. The Ministry of Labour, of Employment and Social Protection's Labour Inspectorate has responsibility for protecting children with disabilities, but programs to ensure access to buildings, information, and communications were not carried out. The penal code criminalises consensual same-sex activity. The penalty for "public expression of love" between two people of the same sex is imprisonment for six months to two years or a heavy fine. Social and judicial discrimination against LGBTQI+ people is thus common due to structural and cultural stigmatisation (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

The country's labour code prohibits some of the worst forms of child labour. For example, children younger than 18 are prohibited from doing "hazardous work", but the term is not clearly defined by the law. In addition, the employment of children under 14 years old is illegal without authorisation from the Ministry of Labour, of Employment and Social Protection. The law, however, also stipulates that the minimum employment age may be 12 years old for certain types of "light" work, such as some agricultural or domestic activities (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Not only does this expose young children to risks of child labour, but it undermines children's right to education because the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, meaning children may be encouraged to enter into work before education, or without having completed school. There are numerous government policies related to child labour, including those to end the sexual exploitation and abuse of children and the use of children in armed conflict, but there is a lack of programs to eliminate and prevent child labour.

In June 2020, the government strengthens the national legal framework through the enactment of the Child Protection Code which includes the provisions criminalizing the six serious violations of children's rights in armed conflict.

Although there are important provisions in place for the respect of child rights, gaps in the national legal framework and its enforcement leave children vulnerable in terms of their judicial protection, the upholding of their rights and accountability for any violations thereof.

The National Plan for Recovery and Peacebuilding 2017-2021 rested on three pillars: peace, security, and reconciliation; social contract between the State and the people; and economic recovery and resumption of productive activities. The efforts in the health sector focused on reducing maternal and infant mortality, and mortality of children under the age of 5, as well as improvement of access to basic health care. Wide-ranging measures to combat the occupation of schools by armed forces were undertaken in May 2016 to ensure that children had access to schools, and other measures had been taken to protect schools from attacks.

CAR adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) in 2014 for the period 2014-2016 and its second for the period 2019-2022. The second NAP is based on several documents and policies relating to women, peace, security, and gender, including the report of the implementation of the first NAP, analysis of national and international legal instruments for the protection of women against gender-based violence, the study of the organizational structure and functioning modalities of the National Observatory on Equality between men and women.

There are different challenges the government identified, including: the existence of discriminatory laws; Insufficient periodic reports on the implementation of international legal instruments; the persistence of insecurity in the country; weak allocation of

financial resources for the implementation of the NAP; lack of a grounded approach for gender-sensitive budgeting at the national and sectoral level; lack of a national database of gender-based violence; lack of a gender-sensitive Sectoral Strategy in the Defence and Security Forces; insufficient synergy between the key stakeholders for the implementation of the NAP.

The 2019-2022 NAP included the following axes: the reinforcement of conflict prevention measures in order to avoid the emergence of violent conflicts and consolidation of peace; the full and meaningful participation and strong leadership of women in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security; strengthening protection to promote and protect human rights, specifically those of women, in times of peace, in times of conflict, and at all stages of conflict resolution; recovery and transitional justice so that the specific needs of women and girls are guaranteed in all reconstruction processes in conflict or post-conflict situations, with particular attention to the most vulnerable (displaced and/or refugee women and girls, survivors of gender-based violence, women and girls with disabilities); strengthening protection and security in the face of new human security threats.

4. Judicial System

The judicial system is defined by the collaboration between national and international justice mechanisms responsible for addressing international crimes and grave human rights violations that occur within CAR.³

³ For this sections see also: Elderfeld, J. (2021). The rise and rise of the Special Criminal Court. <http://opiniojuris.org/2021/04/07/therise-and-rise-of-the-special-criminal-court-part-i/>; Fichtelberg, A. (2015) Hybrid

Various mechanisms are in place to fight impunity for alleged international crimes committed in the country, including regular courts of general jurisdiction and a specialized hybrid court known as the Special Criminal Court (*Cour pénale spéciale*) (SCC). In addition, the Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission (*Commission vérité justice réconciliation et réparation* - CVJRR) play a crucial role in advancing justice and reconciliation amongst communities.

Within the judicial system, the highest court is the Court of Cassation. While the Criminal Court of Cassation, with jurisdiction over crimes outlined in the Criminal Code (including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide), is based in Bangui, Courts of Appeal are located across the country. Comprising a President, two associate judges, and six jurors, each court is supported by a registrar, and cases are presented by the Prosecutor-General or a delegated public prosecutor. Designated as a non-permanent court, the Criminal Court, as per the Code of Criminal Procedure, should hold one ordinary session every six months in the jurisdiction of each Court of Appeal. However, practical challenges, both internal and external to the judicial administration, hinder the adherence to this schedule. Factors include insufficient and diminishing resources for the justice system, ongoing insecurity in the country, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The infrequency of sessions poses a significant challenge in a country where violence is pervasive, and the scheduled sessions are

tribunals: a comparative examination. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6639-0>; El Gantri R, Yaliki A (2022) A drop of water on a hot stone' justice for victims in the Central African Republic: justice for victims in the Central African Republic. International Centre for Transitional Justice. <https://www.cordaid.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2021/03/A-Drop-of-Water-on-aHot-Stone-Report-2021.pdf>

insufficient given the scale of crimes and the number of alleged perpetrators. Despite the persistent challenges, in recent years, the country has shown some notable progress. In his 2002 report, the UN Secretary-General noted that, as of 1 February 2022, 80% of first instance and appellate courts were operational (UNSG, 2022). The Office of the Prosecutor-General, has been active in prosecuting war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. Although convictions have been secured primarily based on ordinary law, these cases involve international crimes.⁴

In general, cases before the ordinary courts are widely broadcasted on radio, the internet, and sometimes on television. This widespread coverage generates strong interest in the justice system and its acceptance by the population. According to a study conducted by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and MINUSCA, these broadcasts contribute to an increase in confidence in justice, including formal justice.

However, despite the determination to ensure justice and fight impunity, numerous challenges persist. These challenges include a severe lack of financial, material, and human resources and expertise, impacting the ordinary courts' capacity to fulfil their mandate. Consultations conducted for this research in June and July 2022 revealed that continuous reductions in the government's budget allocated to the justice system significantly affect the administration of justice, including the protection of victims and witnesses. Another critical issue - highlighted during consultations for the purpose of this research undertaken with stakeholders in the country - is the lack of independence of the ordinary courts, which

4 The term is used to refer to type of crimes extremely serious violations of international law, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

are heavily influenced by political alliances. In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Justice developed a sectoral justice policy in 2018-2019. The policy aimed at addressing issues such as the protection of victims and witnesses, the establishment of a permanent justice system, access to justice (especially for international crimes and sexual and gender-based crimes) and procedural fairness. To ensure the policy's implementation, in January 2020, a decree was adopted, representing the first of its kind in CAR. While initially seen as a positive commitment, subsequent challenges in implementation raised questions about the policy's practical impact and effectiveness (MINUSCA and UNDP, 2019). The judicial system is still encountering several challenges in achieving full operational capacity. Ongoing conflict and insecurity exacerbate these challenges, as the presence of armed groups makes it unsafe for judges to travel within their respective jurisdictions. Security concerns and the control of large areas by armed groups impede the location and apprehension of suspects. Moreover, detention facilities are obsolete and severely overcrowded, with detainees often exceeding legal limits for pre-trial custody and living in very poor conditions.

The annual count of criminal sessions organized falls short of the legal minimum, and the volume of cases brought to trial is inadequate given the magnitude of crimes committed since 2002. The independence of the police and judicial authorities from the executive power is not complete. Moreover, access to lawyers is not a viable option for the vast majority of citizens. This is primarily attributed to a chronic shortage of lawyers, with an estimated ratio of one lawyer per 40,000 individuals, and their concentration mainly in Bangui, the capital. Furthermore, legal fees are often prohibitively high, and lawyers tend to be selective about the types of cases they accept. The scarcity of legal professionals and the financial barriers to legal representation highlight significant

obstacles in ensuring widespread access to legal services for the population (Alexandre, 2023).

Access to justice poses a significant challenge due to the prolonged conflict and its consequences, particularly the inter-community conflict in 2013. War has severely affected the judicial system rendering non-operational most institutions in the country (Alexandre, 2023).

The conflict, spanning several years, has disrupted the functioning of key institutions, and efforts to resume normal operations are tentative. The legal system is grappling with multiple obstacles. While various devolved services and administrations are making attempts to resume their activities, the prevailing conditions in the country, marked by insecurity, social unrest, political instability, and economic fragility, continue to hinder progress.

The overall climate in the country remains uncertain, making it difficult for institutions, including those related to justice, to operate effectively. The pervasive impact of these challenges underscores the complexity of rebuilding and re-establishing functional systems in a country where the aftermath of conflict has left a lasting impact on social, political, and economic structures.

4.1. Alternative forms of justice

The absence of functional state legal institutions in most parts of the country, along with their inefficiency where they do exist, coupled with challenges in accessing legal representation, has led people to seek alternative forms of justice, such as neighbourhood justice. In the current context, a diverse range of actors somehow compensate the deficiencies of the state judicial system. This includes representatives of local authorities such as neighbourhood or village chiefs, non-governmental organizations, community leaders within faith-based or women's organizations, and, notably,

armed groups. Each of these entities pursues its own objectives and operates according to distinct principles. Conflict resolution within these alternative systems is motivated by factors such as religion, legal norms, morals, or customary practices. Mediation or consultation is generally used, and the nature of sanctions applied can vary. The relationships among these actors, whether formal or informal, exhibit significant variation. Citizens' trust in these alternative options is influenced by factors such as the type of service provided, whether the services are free, the available means of action, and the reputation of the entities offering alternative form of justice. However, these mechanisms are often fragile and subject to criticism for issues like discrimination, corruption, and abuse of power. Additionally, the absence of supervision, formalization, and cooperation among those administering informal justice raises concerns about the consistency of judgments. The lack of oversight and standardized procedures in alternative justice mechanisms may contribute to variations in decision-making, potentially undermining the principles of fairness and equality. As a result, efforts to address these criticisms may involve enhancing the transparency, accountability, and coordination of alternative justice systems to ensure that they align with principles of justice and do not perpetuate social inequalities or abuses of power.

Despite these challenges, individuals seeking to assert their rights often turn to these alternative services, viewing them as legitimate, locally rooted, cost-effective, and readily available. Consequently, any efforts aimed at structuring legal assistance and improving the availability of legal services to address grievances must recognize and incorporate these forms of informal conflict resolution systems. The diverse actors and methods involved in such mechanisms should be considered in the development of strategies to enhance access to justice. There should be a mechanism for appropriately referring those seeking justice, whether

to legal counsel, conciliation, mediation, or legal assistance. This approach acknowledges and respects the existing local systems of informal justice while striving to improve and complement them, fostering a more inclusive and effective access to justice for all.

The decentralized nature and diversity of said systems underline the complexity of formal and informal justice mechanisms, requiring nuanced approaches to address the multifaceted landscape of conflict resolution and access to justice. This research confirmed that there is a notable preference for alternative justice over the state judicial system. Only 25% of those interviewed expressed trust in formal services, while 55% expressed trust in alternative justice mechanisms (MINUSCA and UNDP, 2019). Many individuals perceive neighbourhood chiefs as a primary means of gaining access to justice. Notably, civil society organizations were regarded as the most trustworthy and accessible entities for justice-related matters. This preference underscores the perception that alternative justice systems, especially those facilitated by local and civil society actors, are more reliable and effective in meeting the justice needs of the population compared to formal state mechanism (Vinck et al., 2018).

4.2. *The Special Criminal Court*

The Special Criminal Court (*Cour pénale spéciale*) was established in 2015 with the primary purpose of addressing serious international crimes committed in the country since 2003.⁵

⁵ In August 2014, the transitional government entered a memorandum of understanding with MINUSCA, providing for a hybrid judicial accountability mechanism involving the participation of international personnel. However, only on 3 June 2015, then-interim President Samba-Panza officially enacted the law establishing the Special Criminal

The SCC is mandated to investigate and prosecute grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. It operates as a hybrid court, integrating both international and Central African judges, prosecutors, and administrators. The court consists of three main organs: the prosecutor's office, the chambers, and the registry. The SCC's mandate is initially set for five years, with the possibility of a single renewal, allowing for a maximum mandate of 10 years. While the SCC is integrated into the domestic judicial system, it is distinct in its hybrid composition, involving both national and international legal professionals. The United Nations (UN) plays a crucial role in supporting the SCC. In fact, MINUSCA has been mandated to assist in the operationalization of the court and provide security. Additionally, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) collaborates with the court through a joint project involving the peacekeeping mission and the Central African government. The Central African government provides political, technical, and financial support to ensure the court's effectiveness (Grebennyuk 2018). The government's commitment reflects its efforts to address and prosecute international crimes committed on its territory. The Special Criminal Court (SCC), operating at a national level and concurrently with the International Criminal Court (ICC), provides an opportunity to expand the accountability for atrocity crimes. By doing so, it aims to amplify the impact of proceedings by ensuring greater resonance with victims and individuals most deeply affected by said crimes. Furthermore, the SCC has the potential to strengthen the country's domestic ownership and capacity in administering justice for international crimes.

Court (SCC). Since the 2015 national consultations, commonly referred to as the "Bangui Forum", there has been a significant public demand for justice concerning international crimes.

Following a period of relative inactivity, efforts to make the court operational gained momentum in 2017. Several key personnel, including the chief international prosecutor and various international and national magistrates, were appointed. The rules of procedure and evidence were adopted by Parliament in May 2018 (Vinck at al., 2018).

The court became operational on 22 October 2018. In December 2018, the SCC disclosed a prosecutorial strategy and subsequently developed a roadmap to implement it. Following these developments, formal investigations were initiated.

The investigation process of the SCC adheres to the civil law legal system and consists of two potential phases before a case proceeds to trial. The first phase is conducted by the prosecutor's office (*parquet*) and is expected to be completed within a six-month period, with the possibility of extension if approved by the judges. The second phase involves a two-judge investigative panel (*cabinet d'instruction*), comprising one national judge and one international judge. This phase allows for an investigation period of up to two years. The investigating judges, who operate independently, seek additional evidence and conduct their own inquiry to determine whether the case merits trial or dismissal. They can also initiate investigations based on complaints from individuals, such as victims or their family members, rather than solely relying on cases referred by the prosecutor.

A team of 20 domestic judicial police officers is responsible for conducting investigations under the direction of prosecutors and investigating judges. While these officers may not possess prior experience in handling the complex cases falling under the SCC's mandate, the UN has facilitated specialized training and provided access to expert advice to enhance their investigative capabilities. This support is crucial for fostering effective investigative practices. MINUSCA, along with two UN-hired investigation special-

ists, assists these officers in their tasks. Furthermore, collaboration with a rapid response unit within the police and *gendarmerie*, known as the UMIRR, provides support to investigate sexual and gender-based violence. Continuous capacity-building efforts are deemed essential to ensure that the officers not only develop their expertise but also uphold the rights of defendants in the execution of their duties.

The SCC has achieved significant results, albeit experiencing delays in its operationalization, attributed, in part, to measures taken to safeguard the court's credibility, independence, and impartiality. Additionally, the complexity of staffing a hybrid court, characterized by a combination of international and national personnel, posed challenges due to limited resources and intricate administrative arrangements.

The first case before the SCC involved war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in May 2019 in Koundjili and Lemouna villages, located in the north-western part of the country in the province of Paoua. The accused were suspected of being members of the "3R" rebel group (*Retour, réclamation, rehabilitation*). The incidents in Koundjili and Lemouna villages were reported as the first major violation of the peace agreement signed in 2019. Following the killings, Sidiki Abass, the head of the 3R rebel group, reportedly handed over to CAR authorities three individuals Issa Sallet Adoum, Ousman Yaouba, and Tahir Mahamat. On 31 October 2022, the three accused were found guilty of crimes against humanity and war crimes for their roles in the massacre of 46 civilians in 2019 and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 20 years to life imprisonment. On 20 July 2023, the appeal chamber confirmed the verdict. In this case, on 16 June 2023, the SCC handed down the first reparations decision which included individual and collective measures. In December 2023, the SCC started a second trial against Kalite Azor,

Charfadine Moussa, Antar Hamat, Wodjonodragba Oumar Oscar, General Fache, Younouss Kalam Yal, Atahir English, Abdel Kane Mahamat Salle, Fotor Sinine, and Yousouf Moustapha for acts constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in Ndélé and its surroundings in the Bamingui-Bangoran Prefecture.

Other proceedings were initiated. In September 2021, the SCC filed charges of crimes against humanity against Captain Eugène Ngaïkosset, known as "The Butcher of Paoua", based on his alleged involvement in crimes committed between 2005 and 2007 and his role as an anti-Balaka leader in Bangui in 2015. In November 2021, the SCC charged Hassan Bouba Ali, also known as Hassan Bouba, a former rebel group leader turned government minister, with war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, he was released under disputed circumstances in November 2021 and had not been re-arrested as of mid-March 2022.

In addition, 18 individuals were arrested and transferred into SCC custody in connection with incidents occurred in 2020, including those related to the Ndélé case and attacks in the Obo region. The court's progress includes:

- Cases before the Prosecutor:
 - 237 individual complaints from victims.
 - 11 cases under preliminary analysis.
 - 1 case under preliminary investigation, which includes allegations of sexual violence.
 - 12 cases referred by the prosecutor to the investigating judges.
 - 7 cases transferred to the domestic judicial system following a preliminary investigation.
- Cases before the investigating judges (*Cabinet d'Instruction*):
 - 22 complaints received from victims.

- 9 cases under investigation by the investigating judges, including two involving incidents of sexual violence (Ndiyun 2023).⁶

The details about the focus of the cases on recent crimes versus those from earlier periods of the conflicts remain unclear. The challenges include obtaining evidence from well-documented recent abuses, identifying witnesses, and securing custody of suspects. However, it is crucial to ensure that the SCC addresses a comprehensive range of serious crimes over its mandate period.

As of December 2023, the SCC has 2 cases at the preliminary investigation (*parquet*) and 23 cases before the investigating judges (*chambre d'instruction*). The Special Criminal Court have 22 individuals charged with war crimes/crimes against humanity; 18 individuals in detention (15 in pre-trial detention and 3 condemned); 3 individuals under judicial control, 3 individuals in provisional release and 1 at large. However, the identities of the suspect are not all known. This has raised criticism about a certain lack of transparency (Cpsrca website). In response the SCC cited the confidential nature of investigations (*secret de l'enquête* and *secret de l'instruction*), which aligns with a general principle in many civil law systems. Although the confidentiality of investigations is legally established in SCC law, adequate access for victims and the public to information regarding efforts to hold in-

6 See also: International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH). (2022). Q & A: opening of the first trial before the Special Criminal Court in the CAR. <https://www.fdh.org/en/region/Africa/central-african-repub-lic/q-a-opening-of-first-trial-before-special-criminal-court>; Human Rights Watch (2022) Central African Republic: first trial at the Special Criminal Court, questions and answers. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/04/FINAL%20CAR%20SCC%20Q%26A.pdf

dividuals accountable for international crimes is essential to fight impunity. Transparency is considered crucial for the effectiveness and meaningfulness of these efforts, particularly for the benefit of victims.

While recognizing the need for confidentiality in certain aspects, the SCC should explore ways to share as much information as possible. This may include regularly updating the public and donors on investigations and focused incidents, ensuring access to legal representation for victims and defendants, communicating preparatory steps for trials, and outlining timelines. Utilizing newsletters and the official website for this purpose can contribute to public understanding and appreciation of the court's work.

Furthermore, providing access to judicial decisions, even in redacted form, or publicizing outcomes of key judicial decisions, could enhance transparency. The failure to regularly share such fundamental information may risk eroding confidence in and support for the SCC's efforts. Therefore, finding a balance between maintaining confidentiality where required and offering sufficient information to the public is essential to build trust and credibility in the court's endeavours. The SCC faces many challenges, like limited support and resources for senior officials, highlighting the need for legal advisers for efficiency and coordination; ongoing security challenges for premises and staff; limited resources for senior officials highlight the need for adequate support and funding. The SCC's efforts to overcome these challenges are crucial for its effectiveness and credibility. Collaborative measures involving the government, the United Nations, and the SCC are essential to address security, detention, and staffing issues. Strengthening infrastructure, providing adequate resources, and ensuring security for all stakeholders are imperative for the successful functioning of the SCC.

5. Crimes against and affecting children: quantitative and qualitative results

The country is currently facing a severe humanitarian crisis characterized by acute food shortages, malnutrition, and heightened vulnerability among children. 2.7 million people, representing nearly half of the population, are experiencing acute food insecurity. Additionally, a substantial 642,000 individuals are perilously close to famine, underscoring the immediate need for intervention (Schlein, 2023). Acute malnutrition is widespread, particularly affecting children under the age of five. The lack of access to nutritious food is exacerbating health issues, leading to potential long-term consequences for those affected.

Over half a million children aged 3 to 17 are not attending school, leaving them susceptible to exploitation, recruitment by armed groups, and trafficking. The lack of education not only jeopardizes their future but also exposes them to various forms of abuse. Minors accused of supporting armed groups (through activities such as working at checkpoints, securing mining sites, performing errands, and serving as child soldiers) are held in detention facilities designated for adult. In December 2022, all children detained for their alleged involvement with armed groups were released, as per a presidential clemency decree. However, their future remains uncertain.

Warries arise about the continued victimization of children. Armed groups and security forces act with impunity, subjecting children to rape, abduction, killing, maiming, and recruitment, perpetuating a cycle of violence. The situation continues to be delicate, placing children at the forefront of the challenges. A considerable portion of the abuses can be attributed to the activities of Wagner mercenaries, which exploitative tactics targeting the country were strongly criticized. Their presence was identified as a hindrance

to achieving lasting peace. The engagement of regional partners is deemed essential because a stable political environment is a prerequisite for peace.

In 2023, the United Nations verified 437 violations against 321 children (179 boys, 142 girls), including 47 children who were victims of multiple violations, confirming the trend of 2022, in which 336 grave violations against 317 children verified (201 boys, 116 girls).

5.1. Killing and maiming

The killing (21) and maiming (59) of 80 children (47 boys, 33 girls) caused by gunshots (42), explosive remnants of war (28), physical assault (5), arson (2), stabbing (2) and crossfire (1) in 2022 were verified by the UN. The current research could register 18 killing and 50 maiming for a total of 68 children.

The killing and maiming of children are the consequence of the protracted conflict that has ravaged the country. It reflects a blatant disregard for the fundamental rights of children and their entitlement to protection.

In the complex and volatile security situation faced by the country, children often find themselves caught in the crossfire of armed confrontations or deliberately targeted by warring factions. Children face the grim reality of being subjected to brutal violence, experiencing the loss of loved ones, and witnessing atrocities to which no child should ever be exposed to. The violence not only results in immediate physical harm but also leaves enduring psychological scars on the survivors. The impact extends beyond the direct victims, shaking the foundations of communities and perpetuating cycles of trauma that hinder the prospects for peace and stability.

The international community must unequivocally advocate for robust measures to protect the most vulnerable. Efforts should

be directed toward holding perpetrators accountable, strengthening mechanisms for monitoring and reporting violations, and providing support for the rehabilitation and reintegration of affected children. Humanitarian organizations play a crucial role in responding to the immediate needs of children who have suffered from such violence, offering medical care, psychosocial support, and education. Additionally, addressing the root causes of the conflict and working towards sustainable peace are essential components of preventing further harm to children in the long term.

5.2. Recruitment and Use of Children

According to the 2023 UN report, in 2022 a total of 134 children (111 boys, 23 girls), between the ages of 7 and 17, were recruited and used by armed groups. 44 boys served in combat roles. A total of 46 children were used by other security personnel. The current research could confirm that also local data report 134 cases of recruitment.

The recruitment of children into armed groups remains a deeply troubling and pervasive issue, reflecting the harsh realities faced by the youth during protracted conflict. Children, often vulnerable and easily influenced, are subjected to coercion, manipulation, and forced conscription, robbing them of their innocence and childhood.

Armed groups, both state and non-state actors, exploit the vulnerabilities of children, drawing them into a life of violence, conflict, and unimaginable sufferings. The recruitment of children for military purposes is not only a violation of international humanitarian law but also a severe infringement on the fundamental rights and well-being of these young individuals. The tactics employed by recruiters varied and often involve threats, abduction, and coercion. Children are used as soldiers, forced into armed combat, and

exposed to life-threatening situations that no child should endure. Efforts to address the recruitment of children require a comprehensive and concerted approach. The international community, along with national authorities, must prioritize the protection of children, enforce existing legal frameworks, and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. Diplomatic pressure and collaboration are essential to ensure that armed groups stop the recruitment of children and release those already enlisted.

Humanitarian organizations play a critical role in providing support for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers, offering psychosocial assistance, education, and vocational training. Additionally, awareness campaigns and community engagement are vital to prevent further recruitment and to create an environment where children can thrive free from the influence of armed groups.

Addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting sustainable peace, and investing in education and social services are fundamental to breaking the cycle of child recruitment in the CAR. By fostering an environment that safeguards the well-being and rights of children, the international community can contribute to a brighter and more stable future for the young generations in the Central African Republic.

5.3. Sexual Violence

The United Nations verified 76 cases of rape perpetrated against 75 girls in 2022. This research has documented 72 cases of sexual violence against girls.

The Central African penal code provides a traditional definition of rape as sexual penetration without consent. However, traditionally, if the victim is over 15 years old and was not a virgin at the time of the incident, rape is not considered a crime. Fur-

thermore, magistrates often exhibit leniency toward the accused, readily granting provisional release or invoking extenuating circumstances. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that even in cases where victims exhibit clear signs of sexual assault, legal proceedings often fail to materialize, leaving the perpetrator better protected than the victim. This discourages victims from coming forward to file complaints, according to a Central African lawyer who spoke to AFP under the condition of anonymity.

5.4. Abduction

The United Nations verified the abduction of 79 children (40 boys, 39 girls). Most children were abducted for the purposes of recruitment and use and/or sexual violence. 77 cases were documented during this research, 34 girls and 33 boys. The abduction of children is a distressing and pervasive issue that continues to have severe consequences for the youth. Beyond forced conscription, children are also abducted for other purposes, such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, and as bargaining tools in conflicts. The abduction of children for forced labour deprives them of their right to education and subjects them to hazardous conditions, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. Additionally, the sexual exploitation of abducted children represents a grave violation of their rights, leaving lasting physical and psychological scars. The consequences of child abduction in the Central African Republic extend far beyond the immediate victims. Families are torn apart, communities are destabilized, and the social fabric of the nation is deeply affected. The trauma endured by abducted children reverberates throughout their lives, hindering their ability to reintegrate into society and the country's prospects for a stable and peaceful future.

5.5. Attacks against schools and hospitals

Some 18 attacks on schools (7) and hospitals (11), including protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals were verified by the UN in 2023. A total of 14 schools were used by other security personnel. This research could register 18 attacks: 7 schools and 11 hospitals.

The recent attacks against schools and hospitals are deeply disturbing, highlighting the alarming disregard for the inviolability of spaces meant to provide education and healthcare. These attacks not only endanger the lives of innocent civilians but also undermine the foundations of stability and progress in a country facing significant social and economic challenges.

Schools, which should be safe places of learning and growth, have become targets, disrupting the education of countless children. The attack on schools robs young minds of the opportunity for a better future, perpetuating cycles of poverty and hindering the country's long-term development. The deliberate targeting of educational institutions not only harms students but also has a ripple effect on communities, eroding the social fabric and depriving the country of its intellectual capital.

Similarly, assaults on hospitals and healthcare facilities compound the humanitarian crisis in CAR. These attacks not only jeopardize the lives of patients seeking medical attention but also undermine the already fragile healthcare infrastructure. Hospitals should be safe havens, providing crucial services to those in need, especially in a country grappling with health challenges. Attacking these institutions exacerbates an already dire situation, leaving communities without essential medical care and contributing to the deterioration of public health.

5.6. Denial of humanitarian access

A total of 50 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were registered in 2022 by the UN. The research recorded 52 incidents. The denial of humanitarian access to children represents a grave violation of their basic rights and exacerbates an already challenging humanitarian situation. In conflict-affected areas, where vulnerable populations, especially children, are in dire need of assistance, restrictions on humanitarian access hinder the delivery of life-saving aid and exacerbate the suffering of those most in need. Children in the CAR face multiple threats, including violence, displacement, malnutrition, and lack of access to education and healthcare. Denying humanitarian access to these vulnerable populations further compounds these challenges, leaving them exposed to the harsh realities of conflict without the necessary support systems. The denial of access to humanitarian organizations impedes the delivery of essential services, such as food, clean water, medical care, and education, which are crucial for the well-being and development of children. This not only jeopardizes their immediate survival but also has long-term consequences, hindering their growth, mental well-being, and prospects for a better future.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research underscores the urgent need for concerted efforts to address the profound challenges faced by children because of the protracted conflict. The findings reveal distressing patterns of child recruitment into armed groups, denial of humanitarian access, and targeted violence, including killing and maiming. These violations not only infringe upon the basic rights of children but

also perpetuate cycles of trauma, hindering the prospects for peace, stability, and sustainable development in the CAR.

Addressing the root causes of violence and instability is paramount for the long-term security and prosperity of the nation. This includes efforts to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and inclusive governance.

As well as efforts to promote children's rights by strengthening the legal frameworks and the enforcement of laws; holding perpetrators accountable; improving social and security mechanisms to prevent abductions; promote education and better wealth conditions and implement programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate children former members of armed groups into society. International collaboration and support are crucial to reach these goals.

Humanitarian organizations play a crucial role in delivering aid to the affected population, in particular children, by affected, working to rebuild and equip educational and healthcare infrastructures.

However, the State must take its responsibilities towards its citizens, especially the most vulnerable ones, promoting peace, stability and respect for human rights. There is a need for increased awareness and advocacy to shed light on the plight of children in the CAR and to mobilize support for their protection and well-being.

Strengthening community engagement and raising awareness about children's rights can empower communities to actively contribute to the protection and well-being. In this regard, establishing effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will enable the tracking of progress and identifying areas requiring further attention. Regular assessments will inform policy adjustments and interventions.

Recommendations

- Advocate for increased international collaboration to address the root causes of conflict in the CAR. Diplomatic efforts should focus on engaging all relevant parties to ensure the protection of children, enforce existing legal frameworks, and hold perpetrators accountable. In this sense, it is important to strengthening the access to justice and the role plaid by the Special Criminal Court.
- Strengthen efforts to guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas. International organizations and NGOs should work collaboratively with local authorities to provide life-saving aid, including medical care, education, and psychosocial support for affected children.
- Implement and enforce measures to prevent the recruitment of children into armed groups. This includes awareness campaigns, community engagement, and targeted programs to address the root causes of child recruitment, such as poverty and lack of educational opportunities.
- Prioritize the rehabilitation and reintegration of children who have been recruited into armed groups. Humanitarian organizations should offer comprehensive support, including psychosocial assistance, education, and vocational training, to help children rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society.
- Strengthen the national legal frameworks and mechanisms for accountability. This includes ensuring that perpetrators of child rights violations, including recruitment and violence, are brought to justice and held accountable for their actions.

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