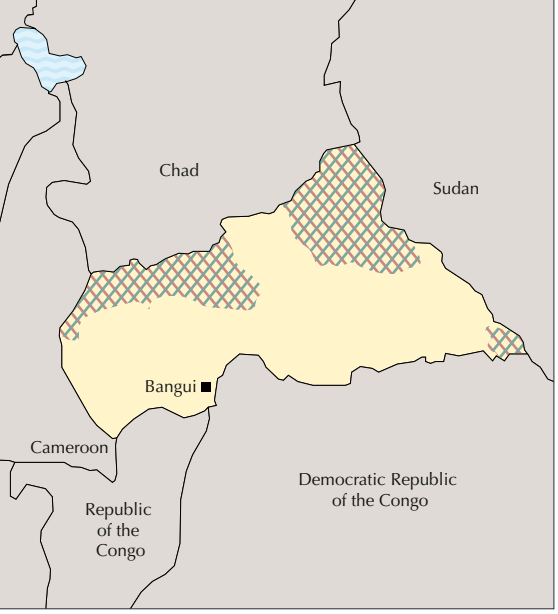

Central African Republic

Quick facts

Number of IDPs	192,000
Percentage of total population	4.3%
Start of current displacement situation	2005
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	212,000 (2007)
New displacement	25,000
Causes of displacement	Armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations
Human development index	159

Nearly eight per cent of the 4.5 million citizens of the Central African Republic (CAR) are either internally displaced or living as refugees outside the country. In November 2010, the UN estimated the number of IDPs at over 192,000, including about 25,000 people who had been newly displaced during the year.

Armed conflict broke out in 2005 between the government of President François Bozizé and armed opposition groups seeking greater political representation and a share of power. The fighting lasted until mid-2008, causing the displacement of 300,000 people, either within CAR or across the border into neighbouring Cameroon and Chad. Displacement was also caused by criminal gangs who were attacking the civilian population. The gangs acted with impunity, taking advantage of government forces overstretched in the wake of the conflict. In 2008, the UN estimated that a third of all people displaced in CAR had been displaced by criminal gangs. The state's inability to control its territory had also made CAR a base for foreign armed groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) which had originally been in northern Uganda. The LRA had displaced more than 20,000 people in eastern CAR since 2008, including 12,000 people in April and May 2010.

UN peacekeeping troops of the MINURCAT force stationed in CAR and Chad were withdrawn in 2010 at the request of the government of Chad; in CAR, President Bozizé asked for international help to ensure security following their departure. Despite peace talks and various peace agreements in 2008 and 2009 between the government and armed opposition groups, a splinter rebel group remained active in the north of the country and carried out attacks from June to October 2010, highlighting the fragility of the peace process and the lack of stability in the run-up to the presidential election, that took place in January 2011.

IDPs in CAR have suffered from a range of human rights violations and abuses, including unlawful killings, sexual violence, and the abduction and recruitment of internally displaced children. Their villages and fields have been looted and destroyed, causing them to lose their livelihoods. Most IDPs were living in 2010 among host communities in remote rural towns while others were still in the bush. IDPs living with host communities relied almost entirely on them for support; those living in the bush received no assistance because of problems of access. While IDPs had not received support to return to their homes, sporadic ad-hoc returns were reported in 2010.

Until 2009, the government had charged the Ministry of Social Affairs with coordinating assistance to IDPs. However, it had neither the funds nor the capacity to respond to their needs. In 2009, CAR's High Commissioner for Human Rights and Good Governance created a national standing committee to coordinate a national response to internal displacement.

Despite these efforts, the government had been unable to assist IDPs by 2010. However, it made several regional and international commitments during the year which could have a positive impact on the protection of IDPs. It signed the N'Djamena Declaration to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the Kinshasa Convention to limit the spread of small and light-calibre weapons. CAR has signed the Great Lakes Pact and took steps in 2010 towards ratification of the Kampala Convention.

In 2010, ministers from CAR, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Uganda met in CAR's capital Bangui to set up a joint military task force under the supervision of the AU to pursue the LRA across the region's vast and porous borders. With the help of the UN, the government was developing a national legal and institutional framework to address internal displacement.

UN agencies and international NGOs have provided some limited protection and assistance to conflict-affected communities in CAR. The cluster system was introduced in 2007 and there were by 2010 ten clusters in operation, including a protection cluster led by UNHCR. However, humanitarian projects remained under-funded. By year's end, only 43 per cent of the $149 million requested in the revised 2010 Consolidated Appeals Process had been funded. The UN Peacebuilding Commission allocated $20 million to support security sector reform, economic revitalisation and rule of law programmes, while the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) gave UN agencies $3 million to assist 500,000 people affected by the ongoing conflict.