

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION UPDATE

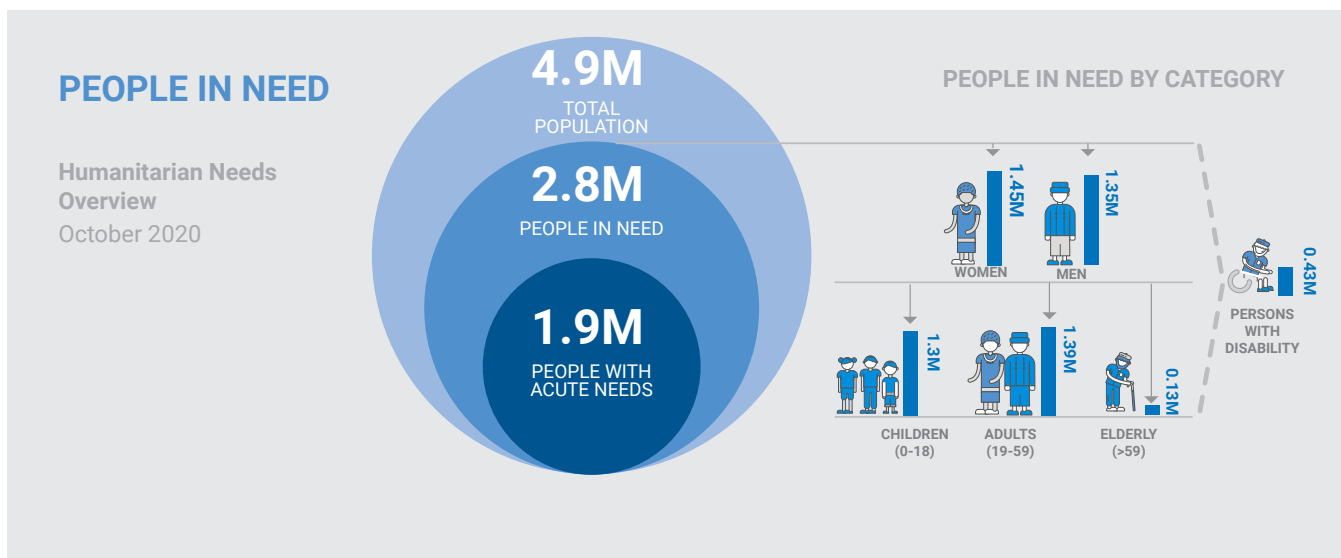
Central African Republic

· LIGHT HNO

· 22 March 2021



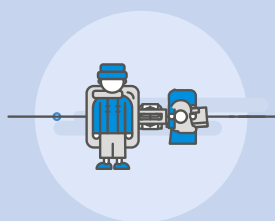
Key figures



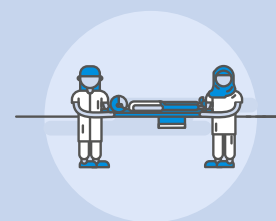
SINCE THEN, THE SITUATION FURTHER DETERIORATED...



336,000 NEW IDPs AND 114,000 NEW REFUGEES FROM MID-DECEMBER TO MID-MARCH



742,000 IDP AS OF FEBRUARY 2021. THE LARGEST NUMBER SINCE 2012



452 PEOPLE INJURED TREATED BY HEALTH ACTORS

CHILD PROTECTION AND SURVIVAL ENDANGERED

14 health districts in nutritional crisis (40%)

1 children out of 2 out of school

462 children associated with armed forces or groups recorded in January 2021



FOOD INSECURITY ROSE

2.3 people are food insecure

Food prices rose by up to 60%

Thousands lost incomes & productive assets

of people adopting crisis coping mechanisms nearly doubled in three months



INCREASING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND VIOLATION OF HIL

At least one case of GBV reported every hour

2 aid workers killed and 8 injured since October

30 health facilities closed due to the insecurity with 14 of them attacked

357 human rights violations affecting 615 people recorded since October



1. Humanitarian impact over the last six months (October 2020 – March 2021)

Impact on people

The humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) has further worsened over the past six months. Election-related violence that broke out in mid-December 2020 has had a devastating effect on civilians. Thousands of people have been forced to flee, human rights violations have surged, hundreds of schools and dozens of hospitals have been forcibly closed and food prices have skyrocketed. This deterioration occurred in an [already alarming context](#), with more than half of the population (2.8 million people) in need of humanitarian assistance and protection and 1.9 million people in acute need. In the past five years, there have never been as many people in humanitarian distress in CAR as today.

The security situation has deteriorated across the entire country. Between October 2020 and mid-March 2021, armed conflicts occurred in all sixteen prefectures with the exception of Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran. During this period, the UNICEF/Rapid Response Mechanism issued 58 new alerts, 57 per cent due to clashes and violence. Two-thirds of the violence-related alerts were recorded in just three prefectures in the west and centre of the country: Ouaka, Ouham and Ombella M’Poko. In the second half of December 2020, ahead of the 27 December elections, people reported 110 security alerts to an NGO-run hotline – nearly a third of all security-related alerts received during the year (399).

In addition, the UNHCR community-based alert mechanism reported that existing protection risks and trends have been exacerbated by the crisis. While 35 per cent of the protection incidents reported in 2020 have been attributed to armed groups, more than half of the reported protection incidents have allegedly been perpetrated by armed groups since the upsurge of violence late 2020.

To the benefit of the civilian population, the turmoil around the December vote was not repeated three months later. The second round of legislative elections took place peacefully on 14 March 2021. No major incident was reported and 90 per cent of polling stations were operational in most prefectures.

Although the recent clashes erupted in the west and centre, data from the Hard to Reach assessments conducted by the REACH Initiative (February 2021) showed that tensions also extended to the east of the country. In three quarters of the 108 remote localities assessed in the south-east (Bambouti, Obo, Djema, Zémio, Bangassou, Bakouma, Gambo and Ouango sub-prefectures), the population experienced a violent shock causing displacement over the 30 days prior to the assessment. 91 per cent of 32 localities assessed in Ouango, Gambo and Mingala sub-prefectures experienced a violent shock that caused displacement in the past 30 days.

Human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law increased. From October 2020 to February 2021, MINUSCA Human Rights Division recorded 357 human rights violations, affecting 615 people and 60 conflict-related civilian deaths (48 men, 7 women, 2 boys, and 3 girls). Since 15 December 2020, health actors have treated 452 people injured by the recent clashes and violence across the country, including 29 girls and 30 boys. UNHCR protection monitoring reports indicate a rise in restrictions of movements, illegal taxes, and property occupations and/or extortions. Community-based protection mechanisms have reported cases of trauma, particularly among displaced people on the axes and scattered in the bush.

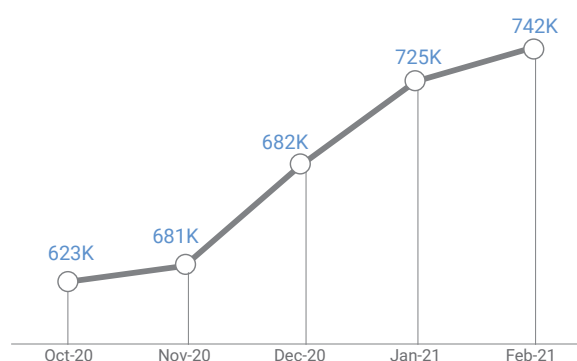


+ 100 % protection alerts received from 15 December 2020 to 15 January 2021 compared to the monthly average (DRC-run hotline)



452 people injured treated by health actors since 15 December 2020, including 59 children

An increasing number of IDPs



Source: Commission Mouvement de Population (CMP)

Conflict and violence have forced almost one in three Central Africans to flee either internally or to a neighbouring country. According to the [Population Movement Commission](#), 742,000 people were internally displaced as of 28 February 2021, of which 235,000 IDPs (32 per cent) lived at 123 sites. Nearly 40 per cent of these sites are not managed by designated camp managers. This represents the largest number of internally displaced persons (IDP) registered since 2014 and a 19 per cent increase since October 2020. The total number of [CAR refugees](#) in neighbouring countries has also increased to 648,000 people. Nearly 1.4 million people are currently displaced within CAR or in neighbouring countries.

Between mid-December and mid-March alone, 336,000 people were newly displaced within CAR due to election-related violence. While many have been able to return home, 140,000 people remain displaced due to insecurity, exposed to severe protection risks and deprived of basic means of survival. In addition, nearly 115,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries during the same period, according to UNHCR. At the same time, 9,375 refugees and asylum seekers hosted by the Central African Republic have also been affected and are in need of protection and humanitarian support.

On average, every hour, at least one case of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is committed. In 2020, 9,216 SGBV cases were recorded through the Gender-based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), including 2,281 cases of sexual violence (25 per cent). The real figure is presumed to be much higher, as the GBVIMS only covers 42 per cent of the country. Although a decrease in cases was registered towards the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, SGBV cases have likely risen with the surge of violence, but were not reported due to restrictions of movements related to clashes and the nationwide curfew, that have significantly reduced access to GBV referencing and services.

Of the 90 protection incidents reported from 15 December 2020 to 15 January 2021 via the Danish Refugee Council run hotline, rape was the most reported type of incident (46 cases); 50 per cent of the victims were women and 50 per cent girls. This figure not only demonstrates the widespread nature of SGBV in CAR, but also that women and girls are those most affected by protection incidents. According to the VBG sub-cluster, at least 60,000 newly displaced women and girls are exposed to sexual violence with very little possibility of care. This situation has serious short and long term consequences on their physical and mental well-being, including social rejections, forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and even death.

In Nana-Gribizi Prefecture, 98 cases of rape were notified during the first six weeks of 2021 according to the health sub-cluster report. In 2020 24 cases of rape were recorded during the same timeframe. This increase is attributed to movement of armed elements in one hand, and the seasonal migration of cattle herders (transhumance) on the other, which usually increases the risks of GBV.

Children across the country have been increasingly exposed to protection risks, such as family separations, the recruitment and use by armed groups, SGBV and different forms of exploitations, including the worst forms of child labour. Between October and December 2020, 437 children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG) were identified and received reintegration support. In January 2021, a record of 462 additional CAAFAG were identified. Families' increased poverty due to raising prices and the fall of livelihoods, school closures, as well as massive recruitment campaigns contribute to explaining this dramatic trend.

The Child Protection Monitoring System has registered 625 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) from the beginning of January 2021 to the end of February 2021. In addition, mobile child protection teams identified 199 unaccompanied and separated children and 185 cases of SGBV committed against children, including cases with multiple perpetrators, between 20 January and 9 March 2021 in the west and centre of the country.

People living with disabilities face further access limitations. Conflict-related violence and displacement have exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities of people living with disabilities, exposing them to increased risks of human rights abuses and reducing their access to basic social services and humanitarian assistance. Over a third (36 per cent) of 2,000 people living with disabilities interviewed by the NGO Humanity & Inclusion reported having been victim of protection incidents and 3 per cent of the women reported having been victim of some form of sexual violence. Children are particularly vulnerable, with over a quarter (27 per cent) living with disabilities, according to the last Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), published in January 2021

Impact on systems and services

Access to health care and nutrition support has further deteriorated since the end of 2020, with the widespread displacement, the forced flight of health personnel, the looting and vandalization of health facilities and the increase in people injured during clashes. Hard to Reach assessments conducted in February 2021 indicated that in nearly half of the 115 remote localities assessed in the north-west (Paoua) and the north-east (Birao, Bria, Ouadda, Yalinga), the majority of people has to walk for over an hour to access a functional health facility. Humanitarian access limitations put a further strain on the weak health services, that already heavily depended on humanitarian support. Due to insecurity, 81 nutritional units and 30 health facilities were closed, with 14 of them that had been attacked, and a dozen mobile clinics were still suspended across the country at the end of February 2021.

Displacement, the presence of armed elements and the destruction of WASH infrastructures during clashes further limited access to water points, especially in localities hosting newly displaced people. Nearly 10,000 IDPs had to share a single water point at Catholic Church in Bossangoa, where they found refuge due to fear of clashes at the end of February. The lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) has affected children's nutritional status and health in many ways, notably through an increase in diarrhoea and poor hygiene conditions. According to the latest Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) published in January 2021, one child out of four (24 per cent) had diarrhoea during the past two weeks prior to the survey.

Exacerbating the learning crisis. Half of the country's children were out of school because of the latest resurgence of violence. Nearly 1,000 schools were forcibly closed, occupied or damaged as a result of clashes and 42 schools were still occupied by armed elements as of 11 March 2021. This is the second major interruption of the education system within less than a year, after schools were closed in 2020 due to COVID-19 for almost half of the year, implying serious impacts on children's learning and their protection. Despite the gradual reopening of many schools in recent weeks, fear persists that some children will never return to school, adding a further layer to the already poor level of education with potential protection risks, such as child marriage, recruitment and use by armed groups and the worst forms of child labour.

Impact on humanitarian access

A more challenging operating environment. Insecurity, poor road infrastructure, logistical constraints and administrative impediments contribute to restricted access to affected people. Election-related violence and targeted attacks on convoys interrupted the country's main supply route from Cameroon (MSR1) for over a month. More than 1,600 inbound trucks, including several dozens with humanitarian supplies, have been stuck at the border for over two months. Since February, traffic has slowly resumed.

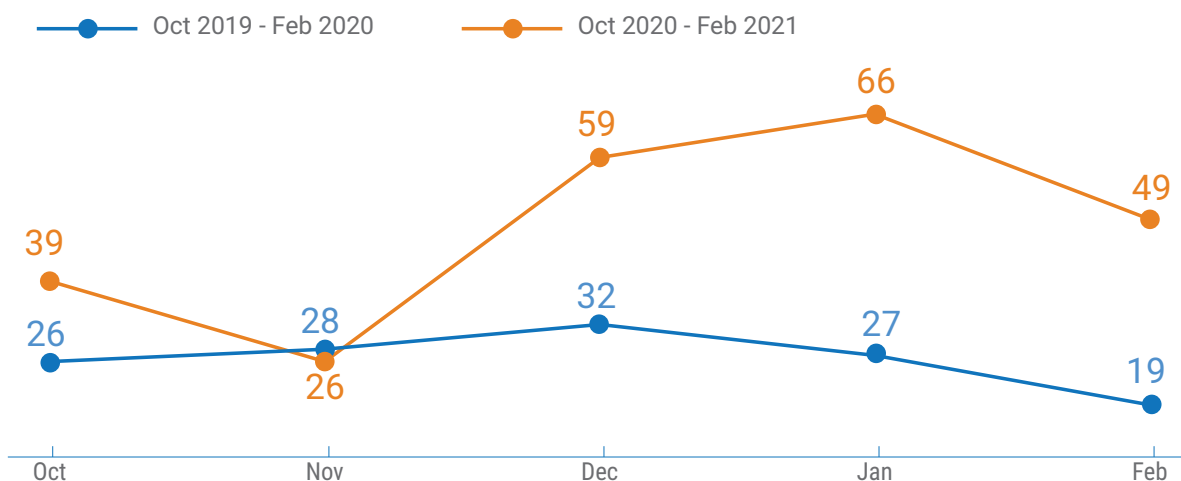
Humanitarians are increasingly targeted by attacks. In 2020, more than one incident targeted humanitarian personnel or property each day, including three humanitarians who were killed and 29 injured. With the renewed tensions and violence observed since the end of 2020, the risk for humanitarian organizations has surged. From October 2020 to February 2021 alone, 234 incidents against humanitarians were recorded, with two aid workers killed and eight injured, compared to 131 incidents during the same timeframe one year before, representing an increase of 79 per cent. Burglaries, robberies and intrusions accounted for the majority of all incidents (64 per cent). Interferences and restrictions (unofficial requests for papers, for example) represented 23 per cent, while intimidations and threats accounted for 11 per cent. Kaga-Bandoro (Nana-Gribizi), Bossangoa (Ouham), Bambari (Ouaka), Bria (Haute-Kotto), Bangassou (Mbomou) and Batangafo (Ouham) were the most affected sub-prefectures during the past four months.

Despite the dangerous working environment, humanitarian partners continue providing life-saving assistance when this is most needed. The latest crisis forced humanitarian organizations to reduce their presence and, in some instances, withdraw from key humanitarian hubs such as Bouar, Bossangoa and Bangassou. Between December 2020 and February 2021, UNHAS relocated 345 humanitarian workers; 266 in December alone. But since the end of January 2021, thanks to a gradual improvement of humanitarian access, humanitarian partners have resumed assistance in most parts of the country.

The continuous improvement of the humanitarian situation in Birao (Vakaga) is the result of strengthened humanitarian presence and MINUSCA's commitment to the protection of civilians. Just one year and half after violent conflicts forced 23,000 people to flee and killed dozens, the living condition of the people in Birao are beyond pre-crisis levels, including for the 4,200 remaining IDPs. From Birao, humanitarians have also been able to access and assist vulnerable people across the northern region of the country. In January 2021, 1,400 people were reached with multisectoral WASH, non-food items and health assistance in Boromata, a town that had suffered violent attacks and massive displacement just a few weeks before.

Humanitarians do not only provide life-saving services to thousands of civilians trapped in conflict but are also seen as a source of trust and safety. Ground Truth Solution's latest survey on beneficiary perception showed that people increasingly consider being treated with respect by humanitarians (79 per cent) and that they feel safe during aid distributions (78 per cent). **The aggravating factors identified in the [Humanitarian Needs Overview \(HNO\) 2021](#) have further worsened over the past six months.** Armed violence not only threatens the protection of civilians but also their survival and physical well-being. The latest conflict severely disrupted MSR1, resulting in a countrywide increase of prices, limited the movement of people, including access to fields and other places of income generation, and forcibly closed essential services such as health facilities and school.

Incidents affecting humanitarian workers



Source: OCHA and humanitarian partners

2. Critical problems related to well-being

Nearly half of the population is food insecure. WFP [mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping \(mVAM\)](#) indicates that in mid-March 2021, 2.3 million people did not consume enough food; an increase in 910,000 people from three months ago and a 9 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2020. This increase in food insecurity was [previously projected](#) for the beginning of the lean season that is to start at the end of April.

The newly displaced people and those who recently returned derive most of their food supplies from subsistence agriculture. Their survival depends on existing stocks of seeds and agricultural tools; however, these were often looted or destroyed when their villages came under attack over the past months. April is a critical time for the preparation of the next agricultural season, with planting starting in May and June. In the absence of combined emergency food distribution and assistance with seeds and other agricultural inputs, food security of the newly displaced, the returnees and their host communities is set to further deteriorate over the course of 2021. These alarming trends regarding people's incapacity to meet their minimum food consumption needs, their increasing dependency on crisis coping strategies and depletion of essential livelihood assets incited food security actors to convene an Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) assessment late March. The [result](#) will be available in April.

CAR continues to face a deterioration of the nutritional situation with a national prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) at 5.8 per cent and chronic malnutrition above 40 per cent. Some 40 per cent of the health districts experienced a nutritional crisis during the last trimester of 2020, according to the National Surveillance and Early Warning System (SNAP). Across the country, cases of severe acute malnutrition among children under five increased by 16 per cent in 2021 compared to the same period in 2020.

Nutritional assessments conducted between December 2020 and February 2021 at different IDP sites indicate GAM rates much above the WHO emergency level of 15 per cent. In Dékoa (Kémo), 26 per cent of under-five IDP children were malnourished and at three sites in Bouar, 17 per cent of IDPs showed signs of malnutrition. High malnutrition rates were also recorded in Bambari and Batangafo (Ouaka, respectively Ouham, both 13 per cent), Bossangoa (Ouham, 10 per cent) and Grimari (Ouaka, 9 per cent). Coverage of community-based management of acute malnutrition remains extremely low as 20 per cent of nutritional support units in health structures are no longer functional due to the deterioration of the security situation.

A year has passed since the first case of COVID-19 was detected on 14 March 2020. Since March 2020, 5,087 people have been tested positive and 64 died due to the virus, as of 18 March 2021. Low capacities limit tests to suspected cases and people at risk. The reported cases are thus not necessarily indicative of the epidemiological situation. During the first half of March, 51 new COVID-19 cases were confirmed, including five on IDP sites, – more than in the first two months of the year (46 cases in January and February), indicating a worsening of the situation.

While most recent cases were reported in Bangui, the confirmation of cases in five other major cities, including on IDP sites, is worrisome (Paoua, Ouham Pendé; Bouar, Nana-Mambéré; Berbérati, Mambéré-Kadéï; Bossangoa, Ouham and Kaga-Bandoro, Nana-Gribizi). It raises concerns of new clusters in urban areas where people face major barriers to accessing basic WASH services and implementing COVID-19 prevention measures, including at the IDP sites across the country where [235,000 people](#) live in poor and overcrowded settlements with limited WASH facilities.

A rapid assessment of health facilities conducted by the REACH Initiative in 13 health districts in the west showed that, even before the election-related crisis, health structures had very low capacities to take basic infection prevention and control measures and to take care of confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients. In districts recently affected by clashes, displacement and the looting of health structures, such as in Bossembélé and Bossangoa, a sharp deterioration of the health and epidemiological situation is predicted.



14 out of 35
health districts
experienced a
nutritional crisis



47 per cent of
CAR population
is food insecure

The COVID-19 pandemic hit a country already struggling with multiple epidemics, such as whooping cough, meningitis, rabies and monkey pox. As of March 2021, the major epidemiological concerns were the ongoing measles and meningitis outbreaks. Three out of 35 health districts were affected by active measles outbreaks. In the first ten weeks of 2021 alone, 371 new suspected cases, including three deaths, were reported across the seven health districts. Meanwhile, three health districts were affected by meningitis, with 129 suspected cases and seven deaths notified.

The epidemiological situation will further worsen in the absence of better access to WASH services, that remain as low as 32 per cent for water and less than 30 per cent for sanitation. People's health status is projected to further deteriorate with the approaching rainy season (April to October) that provides conducive conditions for mosquito-borne diseases – malaria being the leading cause of death among children – respiratory infections and a breeding ground for germs.

3. Critical problems related to living standards

In addition to the most violent recent shock related to the December elections, floods between September and November 2020 also had a considerable impact on thousands, destroying houses and crops. In October 2020 alone, 16,000 people were affected by floods, especially in the north (Ndélé, Birao) and center (Bambari, Kabo) of the country. Overall, 314,000 people live in the nine most exposed sub-prefectures according to the [national flood susceptibility and risks study](#).

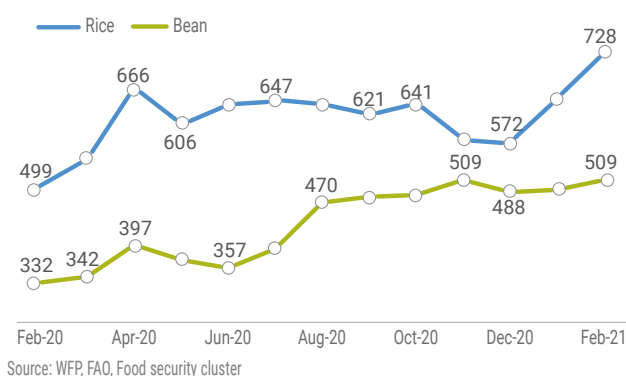
While structural vulnerabilities remain, such as poverty and limited access to markets and seeds, these shocks continue to deteriorate civilians' living standards and their capacity to meet their basic needs. The shocks have further exacerbated vulnerabilities, particularly of women, with 81 per cent of women in rural areas estimated to be poor, compared to 69 per cent of men.

Rising prices and loss of purchasing power. Due to the combined effects of the interruption of the country's main supply route (MSR1) and the limitation of agricultural production due to the conflict, the prices of basic food and non-food items have risen by up to 60 per cent in just a few weeks. This increase occurred in a country where more than 70 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and struggles every day to afford a nutritional meal.

The food prices most affected by the electoral crisis were meat (+40 per cent), salt (+27 per cent), vegetable oil (+25 per cent) and beans (+20 per cent). As these products are widely used in Central African households, the rise in prices has considerably diminished purchasing power. Limited national production and high dependency on imports has further weakened the availability of food supplies on the market.

Negative coping mechanisms as a consequence. The number of people adopting crisis or above crisis food-based coping mechanisms has nearly doubled in three months from 1.2 million people in mid-December 2020 to 2.1 million in mid-March 2021. Limited opportunities have led 77 per cent of household to spent their savings, and more than one out of two households to reduce expenses on health and education and 43 per cent of them to borrow money to buy food. These data indicate a high risk for undernourishment which can exacerbate the burden of malnutrition and related diseases particularly among displaced households.

Rising food prices (in CFA)



Between October 2020 and February 2021, the prices of non-food items included in the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) increased by 27 per cent **countrywide**, up to 48 per cent in Berbérati and 32 per cent in Bouar in the west of the country, according to the Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (REACH Initiative & Cash Working Group partners). In Bouar, a key commercial hub on the Cameroon-Bangui axis, 92 per cent of merchants

reported that local traders had to close down their business during the first half of January. At the national level, the prices of mosquito nets and tarpaulins rose by 50 per cent and 43 per cent for cookware. This increase limits people's purchasing power but also the capacity of humanitarians to purchase and assist the newly displaced with acute needs with basic household items.

While internal displacement has reached new heights, some of the highest levels of vulnerability are concentrated at IDP sites, where very few services are available. The latest data from the [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#) (DTM) confirmed that IDPs highly depend on humanitarian assistance and have very limited access to livelihoods and basic services. Humanitarian assistance is considered the main source of food in 39 per cent of the 845 localities hosting IDPs. This proportion reaches 85 per cent of localities in Ouham-Pendé prefecture. Only in 20 per cent of the localities hosting IDPs can people access drinking water in sufficient quantities; this figure is as low as 10 per cent, respectively 7 per cent in Mambéré-Kadéï and Mbomou prefectures.

Due to the dry season, the limited number of dedicated camps coordinators and camps managers, poor site planning and negative coping mechanisms, fires left already vulnerable IDPs without shelter, food stocks and basic household items. At least 1,500 IDPs were affected by accidental domestic fires in Alindao (Basse-Kotto) and Bambari (Ouaka) in early March, destroying their shelters and other property. A fire destroyed nearly 100 shops at a key commercial hub in Ndiffa (Vakaga) in mid-March, risking supply shortage of agricultural inputs for the entire region ahead of the planting season. In Dembia (Mbomou), a fire completely destroyed 170 cassava fields in early March, along with 50 granaries full of food reserves. Following fire hazards during the dry season, flood risk will again heighten during the upcoming rainy season that is to start in April, in the absence of urban planning and disaster mitigation measures.