

Addressing Forced Displacement in the Central African Republic: How the international community can support protection efforts of Central African refugees and internally displaced people

On April 28th, the Governments of the Central African Republic (CAR), Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo, Chad, Sudan, and South Sudan, resolved to deliver durable solutions for the [1.4 million](#) Central Africans forcibly displaced by decades of conflict. In partnership with United Nations Refugee agency (UNHCR), the alliance of governments signed the [Yaoundé Declaration](#), which facilitates regional cooperation in strengthening protection, integration, and empowerment efforts for Central African refugees, IDPS, asylum-seekers, and returnees. The Declaration marked the first step toward a unified regional effort to mitigate one of the largest displacement crises on the African continent. As part of the coordination effort outlined, there is a call for additional support from the international community to ensure that the recommendations made in the Declaration successfully materialize. Presumably, this is meant foremost as a request for financial support, as only [9%](#) of UNHCR's financial needs for the CAR have been met for 2022, and its budget for Cameroon, the country who hosts the majority of Central African refugees, is only [4%](#) funded. In addition, neighboring and refugee host countries of Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo have their own existing economic instabilities.

However, perhaps this appeal for support from the international community was also one for attention --neither global northern countries, nor media outlets, have done much to raise awareness about the situation in the Central African Republic. Though UN peacekeepers have deployed to the country for years, and donor states like the United States contribute "soft earmarked" funding to UNHCR's and other UN agency's general efforts, the CAR has not received large scale international attention that corresponds with the breadth of the protracted crisis generated within its borders. The United States, for example, has only admitted [1,965 Central African refugees since 2012](#), a significantly lower number than of refugees from neighboring countries with relatively similar protracted conflicts. While the reasoning behind this incongruity is beyond the scope of this brief, it is hoped that with the enactment of the Yaoundé Declaration, and the resultant regional coordination mechanism, the international community might take more direct action in supporting Central African refugees and IDPs. The following brief presents situational context of the country to frame some of the drivers of forced displacement in the country, outlines the Yaoundé Declaration's primary objectives in terms of something, and provides recommendations for the international community's involvement moving forward.

Drivers of the Forced Displacement

The Central African Republic (CAR), a landlocked country in the eponymous region of central Africa, has been embroiled in relatively consistent conflict since gaining independence from France in 1960. The latest bout of conflict began in 2012, when a number of armed groups coalesced to launch a full-scale rebellion, culminating in a coup d'état, and a consequent outbreak of violence among rebels and opposing militia groups. In 2014 after two years of conflict, 900,000 Central Africans had been internally displaced, and 200,000 sought refuge in neighboring countries, figures that represent [approximately 20%](#) of the population at the time. As the government struggled to implement peace agreements signed in [2017](#) and one led by the African Union and the UN in [2019](#), a contentious presidential election in 2020 led to another major spike of violence where [200,000 people](#) were forced to flee their homes – half of whom were children.

In conjunction with the protracted conflict driving forced migration, the country has contended with both extreme climate events, such as severe flooding in the capitol Bangui in 2019 which destroyed [thousands of homes](#), and longer-term climate change impacts like irregular weather patterns that infringe upon agriculture calendars, and create inhospitable land and consequent food insecurity. Currently, 700,000 Central Africans are internally displaced, and 600,000 are living in neighboring countries as refugees.

The Yaoundé Declaration

The Yaoundé Declaration was the culmination of a convening in Yaoundé, Cameroon, at the Regional Ministerial Conference on “Solutions in the Context of Forced Displacement related to the Central African Republic.” Each participating country in the convening is a host to Central African refugees, and recognized the need for a unified coordination effort to ensure the sufficient protection of refugees, and the promotion of their socio-economic inclusion in their host country. Another significant objective of the convening, and the ensuing agreement, was also to support ongoing reconciliation processes in CAR, not just for the purposes of peace in the country itself, but also stability for the greater region.

In the Declaration, there are four major provisions. The first discusses strengthening institutional framework for the protection of refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs, and returnees. Notably, this provision included integrating a refugee registration into national registration systems, including the collection of biometrics, to facilitate the issuance of identity documentation for refugees in host countries so they can be recognized as eligible for public and private services. This comes as a welcome improvement, as Central African refugees have [described](#) low quality and unrecognized identification cards as a significant obstacle in receiving benefits and services from host country governments, as well as to opening bank accounts, seeking employment, and integrating into society.

Further promoting better pathways for Central African refugees to integrate into their host communities, the second provision discussed the need for host countries to include Central African refugees into their development plans, facilitate access to employment, arable land and property, and reinforce self-reliance mechanisms to foster resilience and self-sufficiency in the refugee population.

Third, the agreement outlined how to create and promote conditions conducive to aid in the sustainable return and reintegration of those forcibly displaced outside of the country's borders, as well as those internally displaced. Finally, the agreement established a solutions-oriented regional coordination mechanism for countries affected by the Central African crisis in the spirit of solidarity in accordance with

commitments made in the Global Compact on Refugees, wherein a steering committee will be created, a UNHCR secretariat will be assigned, and several UN agencies will support. The provision also calls for the solicitation of financial support for implementation of the mechanism from regional and international partners. This coordination mechanism is only the fourth regional instrument of its kind to be put in place by UNHCR, the others were on behalf of the protection displaced Afghans, immigrants in Central America and Mexico, and refugees in the East and Horn of Africa.

Recommendations for the international community to support Central African refugees and IDPs

Support and fund programming that addresses increased incidences of gender-based violence among IDPs

Unfortunately, the Declaration does not identify particularly avenues in which to support and protect Central Africans from gender-based violence (GBV). According to the UN Office for Coordinated Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), incidences of gender-based violence in the country have significantly increased over the past year, particularly among vulnerable populations like IDPs – as of late 2021, more than 1 million people in the country are in need of psychosocial support services and health assistance as a result of gender-based violence. In addition to funding programming that provides IDPs with sustainable housing, thus making women less vulnerable to GBV, the international community can encourage the establishment of a new National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence in CAR (the previous strategy ended in 2021).

Ensure accountability for the implementation of the Declaration, and the consequent protection of forcibly displaced Central Africans by all signatories

This can be accomplished, in part, by providing robust and targeted financial support to UNHCR to ensure its work in the region is appropriately funded. Additionally, the international community can put measures in place to mandate reporting on implementation from both UNHCR, and each signatory country, to make sure that all parties involved are operationalizing the provisions of the agreement in a swift and effective manner.

Increase admission of Central Africans, and displaced individuals from other signatories, through national refugee admissions programs

As stated previously, the United States has admitted only a small number of refugees from the CAR since 2012. While explanations for this could range from a lack of desire of Central Africans to come to the U.S., to lack of awareness and political will by the U.S. to solicit Central African refugees, the United States and other global northern countries must continue to admit Central Africans, Congolese, Cameroonians, South Sudanese, Sudanese, and Chadian refugees through national refugee programs. Though inter-continental refugee admissions are not the solution to forced displacement in the Central African Republic, nor anywhere else, countries such as the United States, France, Germany and others that operate comprehensive refugee admissions programs with extensive support and protective services must exercise international solidarity by admitting more refugees from the region, if those individuals desire to reside in those host countries.