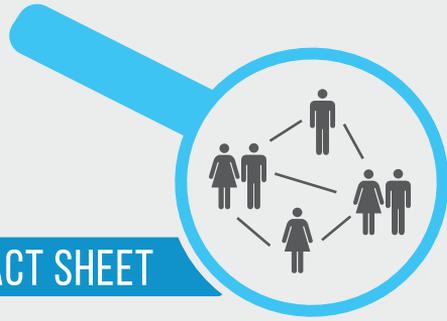


MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES IN CRISIS

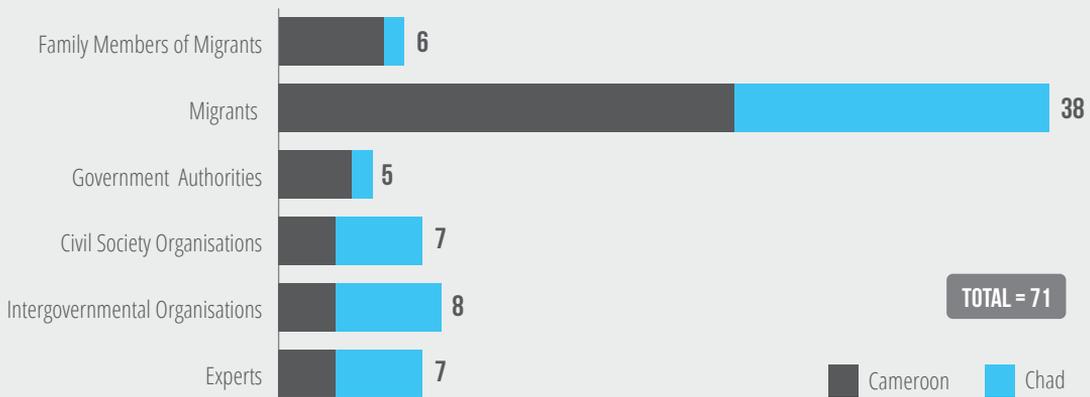
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC FACT SHEET



FOCUS

The impact of migrant returns from Central African Republic on the socio-economic development of Cameroon and Chad

INTERVIEW DATA (APRIL - MAY 2016)



CONTEXT

TIMELINE



MIGRANT RESPONSES

SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF MIGRANTS

- Cameroonian migrants are farmers, traders, gold and diamond sellers
- Some Chadian migrants are shop owners, diamond traders, rural pastoralists
- Some urban-dwelling Chadian migrants have formal skills

Violent clashes between Séléka and Anti-Balaka militias and subsequent reprisals against foreigners prompted many Cameroonian and Chadian migrants to flee CAR in large numbers between 2013 and 2014.

While some Cameroonian migrants took refuge in Christian churches in CAR before planning their eventual escape from the country, others found havens in the homes of friends or their embassies in CAR's capital, Bangui. Both Cameroonian and Chadian migrants fled the crisis in haste, leaving behind assets such as cash, houses, cars, bank statements and other important documents.

Up to 4,000 Cameroonian migrants were initially evacuated by air from Bangui to Douala through arrangements by their government. Others travelled by road, borrowing trucks filled with goods and even travelling in containers. Others escaped on foot through dense, patchy forests. Most Cameroonian migrants did not organise collectively, but rather individually through the assistance of relatives to whom they returned. Chadian migrants escaped the crisis narrowly because of assistance from IOM and the Chadian military. They hid their CAR nationality documents thereby claiming Chadian citizenship because of assumptions that returnees would receive substantial support from the state and international organisations. Nevertheless, due to waning support to Chadian returnees, some reverted to their CAR identity documents because of perceived benefits from refugee status in Chad.

While Cameroonian returnee respondents on average benefited from familial ties in their country of origin upon return, Chadian returnee respondents generally did not maintain relationships with relatives while abroad and could therefore not rely on these networks upon return.



No, we did not have time to prepare ourselves. I thought the crisis would not last above two months, but the crisis became serious and it was too late.

(Migrant from Chad in CAR, Male, 43 years old)



INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Cameroonian and Chadian authorities evacuated hundreds of thousands of their nationals by road or air during the height of the crisis in CAR. Upon return, the state provided Cameroonian returnees with medical care, psycho-social counselling, transportation assistance and cash vouchers. In the case of Chad, returnees were initially held in transit sites before being transferred to more permanent dwellings in the south of the country. Moreover, the government of Chad established the National Commission to Welcome and Reintegrate Refugees and Returnees to coordinate assistance in conjunction with international agencies such as IOM.

Although it is clear that the governments of Cameroon and Chad played a pivotal role in evacuating, repatriating and resettling their nationals during the CAR crisis, there is a perception by returnees and non-governmental organisations alike that the states have not adequately addressed long-term reintegration. Similar critiques have been lodged at intergovernmental agencies, which were perceived as being preoccupied with refugees and asylum seekers and less concerned about migrant returnees.

Besides national governments and international organisations, other actors have been tangentially involved in responding to the needs of returnees, including private sector actors in the Chadian capital, N'Djamena, who enabled the use of cash vouchers supplied by state and international organisations as well as local community leaders in the rural south who provided land to returnees through sale or rental arrangements. In the case of Cameroon, Muslim dignitaries donated food and clothing and provided shelter to hundreds of stranded returnees.

LEGAL SITUATION OF MIGRANTS

- Cameroonian migrants in CAR exempt from visas for up to three months (part of CEMAC free movement of persons agreement); required to have residence card after 90 days
- Migrants in CAR of Chadian origin possess CAR passports and birth certificates
- Chadian returnees shift from returnee to refugee status because of presumed benefits



Creating income-generating activities is the appropriate solution. Returnees need to become autonomous and to affirm themselves.

(Executive Director, Yes Cameroon, Cameroon)



POLICY LEARNING

Cameroonian and Chadian migrants could not prepare adequately for their departure from CAR. Consequently, even the wealthiest returnees have become destitute and dependent on relatives, governments or aid agencies. Moreover, it is clear that post-CAR crisis fatigue has left many returnees destitute and disillusioned. As a case in point, many Cameroonian returnees are not formally registered with state agencies and do not receive allocations from the state. The Reception Committee of Returned Migrants from CAR – created for the management of returnees airlifted from Bangui to Douala, and thus not covering the significant number of returnees travelling by other means – was essentially an ad hoc structure. Dissolved in March 2014, the Committee could have played a more meaningful role in the reintegration of returnees. From a policy standpoint, the lack of sustainable reintegration has left many returnees vulnerable to exploitation and possible re-migration to CAR, where, despite its instability, Cameroonian migrants have found considerable economic opportunity.

Migrant returns to urban and rural settings in Cameroon and Chad have had destabilising impacts. In Chad, surrounding villages resent returnees who have been accused of putting a strain on land and water resources, bringing about food insecurity, changes in livelihoods and customs, and increases in criminal activity. Contrastingly, the establishment of returnees' sites has also created possibilities for small businesses in surrounding villages and cities to thrive.

In addition to the range of impacts on communities hosting returnees, the CAR crisis has also affected national emergency responses. Although the government of Cameroon does not have a policy framework on migration, it allocated sovereign funds generated from its own national budget to evacuate by air and repatriate up to 4,000 Cameroonian returnees, who benefited from the provision of basic social services such as health, water, food, and shelter, as well as transportation assistance to their desired destinations. Nevertheless, the considerable number of migrants who travelled by road did not benefit from these services, and this disparity in treatment represents a gap in policy and practice that must be addressed in the case of any future crises.

Although the governments of Chad and Cameroon initially responded to the needs of their nationals in CAR with robust efforts, they struggle to fulfil long-term obligations to returnees, particularly in respect of the provision of land for farming, national identity documents and employment. Reintegration plans must be sustainable and financially viable in order to succeed. Civil society organisations and private sector actors in Cameroon and Chad served as the first interface of support for migrant returnees, and continue to play a meaningful role in reintegration assistance. While Chadian NGOs were supported by the government and intergovernmental organisations to manage returnee transit sites, business owners and entrepreneurs supplied food and other relief items to returnees in transit camps, particularly in Cameroon.

As donor priorities shift to emergent crises in the Lake Chad basin, however, civil society organisations in Cameroon and Chad struggle to secure sufficient funding to adequately respond to the needs of returnees, and this must be addressed.



We must formulate a legislative framework that addresses crisis management cases. UNHCR is concerned with refugees, IOM handles third country nationals. What about returned migrants?

(Subdivisional Officer of Kentzou, Cameroon)



There have been no meetings on lessons learned whether from the [Chadian] government side or from the humanitarian community side. There is even no document going this way, a sort of institutional memory about these questions does not exist at all.

(Head of OCHA in N'Djamena, Chad)

