



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

COUNTRY PROFILE

Development Partners Meeting on the Sudan
Regional Refugee Crisis

September 17, 2024

Country Context

The violence in Sudan has affected South Darfur, which borders the remote northern Vakaga prefecture of the Central African Republic (CAR). As of 30 August 2024, a total of 35,201 individuals have fled from Sudan into CAR, including 29,043 refugees and 6,158 refugee returnees.

The Government of CAR has kept its borders open to Sudanese refugees throughout the conflict. On 19 August 2023, it granted *prima facie* refugee status (automatic recognition of refugee status based on readily apparent, objective circumstances in the country of origin, without individual assessments) to Sudanese nationals fleeing violence. Based on current trends, UNHCR anticipates that up to 35,000 refugees total, and 3,300 additional refugee returnees will cross into CAR by December 2024.

The government has adopted an out of camp policy, which includes the establishment of refugee settlements within existing towns and villages, as well as the effective inclusion of refugees in the national health and education system.

Most refugees from Sudan are women and children, arriving with few resources after enduring violence in their places of origin as well as during their journey. They mainly cross through the Am-Dafock border and proceed to Birao, some 65 km away, where the Korsi (which means “welcome”) refugee settlement has been established. Korsi is located in the Vakaga prefecture, one of the poorest, most remote and sparsely populated areas of the country, which is also plagued by insecurity.

One of the 20 prefectures of CAR, Vakaga covers an area of 46,500 km² and had a population of 52,255 according to the 2003 census. Its capital, Birao, hosts 16,038 of the 35,228 Sudanese refugees registered in CAR. Korsi is a neighborhood closer to essential infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and the base of the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR. Additionally, internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by conflict are present in a nearby site called Yaya.

Some 14,000 refugees are scattered in other regions, in hard-to-reach areas where only protection, registration and documentation are provided due to the complex security environment and logistics challenges. These refugees are mainly “sur place” refugees – migrants who were in CAR when the war in Sudan intensified and are now unable to return. They are among the most vulnerable and peaceful coexistence and adapted self-reliance programmes are paramount to support them.

Evidence Base

CAR has one of the highest poverty rates in the world and faces its own significant development challenges, as well as conflict and displacement dynamics. Poverty stands at 68 percent nationally, with many IDPs in camps (World Bank 2023). Most households (9 in 10) are at ‘vulnerable’ to ‘falling into poverty’, with larger households – whose heads are less educated and primarily engaged in agriculture – facing the greatest risks.

While agriculture is by far the most common activity, households involved in agriculture face significant limits on productivity; more must be done to improve access to markets and inputs for the sector to be a stable basis for self-reliance.

At the same time, access to basic infrastructure – including schools, medical services, and roads – remain a significant challenge for most households. This is particularly true in the regions bordering

Sudan, where the share of children within a one-hour walk to school is only 20 percent. Results show those who live within a one-hour walk are 20 percent more likely to attend school than those 1-2 hours away.

The existing fragility and background of violence underscores the vital importance of programmatic responses to the new influx of refugees from Sudan, to assist host communities and incoming populations.

Ongoing Development Partner Interventions

Several development partners are actively responding to the Sudan crisis by addressing the needs of both refugees and host communities in the Vakaga prefecture and surrounding areas. These efforts include:

- The **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)** launched in February 2024 an agriculture project to strengthen the self-reliance of refugees and vulnerable families from the host community in Korsi. An estimated 2,000 households (10,000 refugees, returnees, and host community households) will benefit from agricultural interventions, with a focus on climate-smart techniques. Local authorities have allocated 10 hectares and ACDA, (*L'Agence Centrafricaine de Developpement Agricole*) the authority designated by the Ministry of Agriculture, has facilitated the establishment of agricultural groups to start farming activities. The project includes the drilling of a borehole on the land to facilitate the cultivation.
- With **African Development Bank (AfDB)** funding, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a stabilization and recovery programme for refugees and host communities in the Lake Chad basin to improve access to basic services, build socio-economic community resilience and support institutional and capacity building.
- The **World Bank** has a pipeline community driven development project to build community resilience in areas impacted by the Sudan crisis.

Recommended Priority Investments

The overarching goal is to advance the inclusion of refugees into national systems. Although government presence in Vakaga is limited and the arrival of refugees has increased the pressure on already strained basic services, there are several opportunities to integrate refugees into local systems, particularly in the sectors of health and education.

1. **Health:** Sudanese refugees are included in the national public health system and the Health Ministry response plans and strategies, particularly in the Vakaga region.¹ The Government has integrated refugees into several free health care projects, notably the SENI PLUS project. Supported by the

¹ These comprehensive plans include emergency response to epidemics, routine vaccination campaigns, and strategies for the prevention and management of malnutrition, as well as prevention against malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

World Bank, this initiative aims to restore and protect essential health services, ensuring that refugees have access to healthcare under the same conditions as the host community.²

To further support these efforts, development financing can help address the significant shortfalls in the quality of health infrastructure and equipment; human resources, both in terms of quality and quantity; and the availability of medical supplies, including medicines and medical consumables.

2. **Education:** Sudanese refugees are included in the national education system. With the onset of the crisis, school enrolments have seen a dramatic rise. At the start of the school year in October 2023, there were 230 Sudanese refugees attending only two schools in the Vakaga prefecture. By the end of the academic year, there were a total of 1,712 Sudanese refugees enrolled in ten schools in the formal education system at the primary and secondary level across the country, including 933 refugees in the Vakaga prefecture and 779 refugees in three other prefectures.³ There are still thousands of out-of-school refugees, returnees, and host-community children in refugee-hosting zones.

To ensure the sustainable integration of refugees in the national education system, further investments are critical to support the Ministry of Education to ensure improved access and quality of education for all children. Infrastructure is one priority investment. Across the five prefectures and fifteen schools which could integrate Sudanese refugees, a total of 180 durable classrooms need to be built to accommodate the integration of close to 9,000 school-age Sudanese refugee children alongside the existing enrolments of nearly 10,000 host-community children. Additional needs also include more water and sanitation facilities, qualifying training and integration for refugee teachers, French language classes, and more textbooks and other learning materials.

3. **Durable housing:** The shelter strategy, tailored to the Birao context and emphasizing community participation, looks at providing homes and not “shelters”. The cost of a 24 square meter shelter is approximately 2000 USD. The goal is to replace all emergency shelters in Korsi with semi-durable shelters by building 3776 houses and an equal number of latrines as of 2025. The target population includes all refugee households, as well as 20% of IDPs, returnees and the host community.
4. **Road Infrastructure:** Advocacy efforts are underway with MINUSCA to rehabilitate the main access road to Korsi. This rehabilitation is crucial for improving accessibility and facilitating the movement of goods and people in the region. UNHCR will support the UN peacekeeping mission by providing fuel and manpower for the operation.
5. **Energy:** To improve safety and accessibility, investments are needed in solar streetlights in public spaces and along roads within Korsi. Solar lighting is a sustainable and cost-effective solution that will provide reliable illumination, and enhance security, especially during nighttime.
6. **Water and sanitation:** Priority interventions include the expansion of the water network to ensure that all residents have access to clean and safe drinking water. This includes the installation of two more equipped boreholes to meet the growing water needs of the community. Investments are also needed to ensure the provision of a family latrine for every household to improve sanitation and reduce the spread of diseases.

² The SENI PLUS project relies on community health interventions to guarantee free health care for children aged 0-5 years, pregnant and or lactating women. It also supports routine immunisation activities, child deworming and prevention of anaemia through the administration of vitamin A.

³ The gross enrolment rate at the primary level increased from 5.2% in December 2023 to 29% by June 2024.