Joint Education and Child Protection Needs Assessment

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Central African Republic

Background

This assessment was conducted as part of a Global Education Cluster (GEC) and Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility (GCPAoR) project funded by the Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA) to strengthen joint needs assessments. Following a global, remote training on joint needs assessments in February 2023, the Education Cluster and Child Protection Area of Responsibility in Central African Republic worked with global support to develop a joint analysis framework and collect existing secondary data. This was followed by deployments of a Needs Assessment Specialist and remote support from a Child Safeguarding and Accountability Specialist between April and June 2023 to finalize the assessment framework, define the scope, train partners in data collection and, finally, coordinate the data collection. Primary data collection was conducted in June 2023. The analysis of findings was done collectively between the Education Cluster and CPAoR in country, and their members, with support from the GEC and GCPAoR. The report has been extensively consulted with partners and validated by the Ministry of Education.

According to the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, almost a quarter of the Central African population lives below the poverty line, in a country where alarming maternal and infant mortality rates coexist with high rates of illiteracy and child marriage.[1] Just as the country was beginning to slowly recover from the repercussions of COVID-19, the consequences of the conflict in CAR exacerbated the challenges faced on a daily basis by a population already exhausted by recurrent armed conflict and serious human rights violations.

The objective of this joint assessment was to improve common understanding of the impact of the crisis on education and child protection needs, enabling:

(i)   the prioritization of geographical areas for intervention and
(ii)   the production of recommendations for informed operational strategies and decisions.

It targeted 67 communities in 39 sub-prefectures with high levels of severity of educational and Protection needs.[2] Data collection took place from May 9 to June 27, coinciding with the end of the school year. The period of interest therefore covered the 2022-2023 school year. The assessment followed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. School surveys were carried out by interviewing educational staff (265 schools assessed/KI interviewed). Sampling was based on a consolidated database of the country's schools, provided by the *Direction Générale des Etudes, des Statistiques, et de la Planification* (DGESP). To guarantee representative results at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% across the entire area covered, the minimum sample size required was 247 schools. Thanks to the Cluster's and CP AoR capabilities, a buffer of 18 schools was added, for a final sample of 265 schools. The number of schools to be assessed in each sub-prefecture was weighted by the total number of schools meeting the criteria initially established, in order to obtain the most representative results possible. 39 education authority KIs, and 67 community actor KIs were also interviewed to capture the situation as well as child protection needs, including for out of school children, at the level of the communities where the schools were located. 36 focus groups with children in and out of school, aged 9-12 (12), 13-15 (12) and 14-17 (12) were also organized (for a total of 278 children consulted).

The findings will be disseminated widely at both country and global levels and will inform the humanitarian response, the Education Cluster and Child Protection AoR strategies, and resource mobilization efforts.

The full report can be accessed [here](#).

Summary of main results

Equal access and learning

The average number of children enrolled in the schools assessed varied from one grade to the next. In particular, there were more pupils enrolled in each school at the secondary level (*Fondamental 2*), which can be explained by the fact that there are fewer schools at this level

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[1] OCHA, Humanitarian Situation Overview, Central African Republic, November 2022.
[2] Ibid.

compared to the primary level (*Fondamental 1*). In addition, there is an imbalance in access to education in favor of boys from the primary level onwards. This disparity worsens at the secondary level, where the gap between the average number of girls and boys enrolled becomes much wider. This raises concerns about equity of access to education, particularly from secondary school onwards.

Most schools catered for displaced (160/265) and returnee (178/265) students. Most of these students encountered enrolment difficulties due to registration fees and lack of administrative documents. Around half of the KIs in these schools observed behavioral and concentration problems among these displaced pupils, both boys and girls.

To encourage parents to send their children to school, the community actor KIs made the following recommendations:

- Organization of awareness-raising sessions on the importance of schooling
- Setting up school canteens
- Donation of school materials
- Financial support to help parents send their children to school
- Equipping/rehabilitating schools

On average, the percentage of children enrolled in the 2022-2023 school year who stopped attending school during the year was 11% for girls and 10% for boys. Financial constraints, pregnancy and marriage were the three most common reasons for dropping out (during the year) reported by KIs in schools. According to community actor KIs, when households did not have the financial means to send all their children to school, girls, especially those aged 13 to 17, were the most likely to miss out on education. Consultations with children reveal similar results: early / forced marriage (a form of Gender-Based Violence - GBV) was the most common reason for dropping out cited by girls, and lack of money/poverty was the most common reason cited by boys. Only 28% of education authority KIs have implemented measures to prevent school dropout, such as awareness campaigns and school canteens, and 38% have taken specific measures to reduce girls' dropout and prevent or mitigate risks of GBV. However, these measures were often limited to awareness-raising activities on girls' right to education (83%) and to a far lesser extent, the distribution of dignity kits (33%).

Most schools (225/265) cater for children with disabilities, with an average of 5 girls and 6 boys per school, or around 2% of total enrolment. Physical disabilities are the most commonly reported (83%). However, school infrastructure is often inaccessible for these children, with low accessibility rates (26% for hand-washing facilities, 48% for toilets, 51% for classrooms and 56% for recreational areas). Only 28% of schools have taken steps to integrate children with disabilities, mainly through awareness-raising sessions (53%) and additional tutoring (34%), but less through physical facilities such as ramps (17%).

Access costs, facilities and services
The WASH results reveal a major concern about the accessibility, availability and gender-responsiveness of sanitary facilities in schools. While Sphere standards recommend 1 latrine door for every 30 girls and 1 door for every 60 boys, the average latrine/pupil ratio was 1 latrine for

every 152 pupils in primary schools and 1 for every 228 pupils in secondary schools. In addition, there was no separation between latrines for girls and boys in 59% of schools, reducing access to facilities for girls due to a lack of privacy and increasing GBV risks. Furthermore, only 4% of schools have adequate facilities for managing girls' menstrual hygiene, including water, soap and privacy. Furthermore, more than half of girls miss school during their periods due to lack of water (65%) and lack of privacy in toilets (48%). The impact of this situation goes beyond health and hygiene. It calls into question equitable access to education and quality learning for girls, compromising their regular attendance in class.

Learning and working conditions

In the sub-prefectures assessed, 67% of education authority KIs reported that at least one school was closed at the time of data collection. The main reason for closures was the lack of teachers (cited by 81% of education authority KIs). School surveys confirmed this shortage, with pupil-teacher ratios well above the national standard (1:65) in 78% of primary schools and 57% of secondary schools. What's more, the percentage of parent-teachers (*maîtres-parents*) represented 68% of the teaching staff. Parent-teachers are members of the community who are used to make up for the shortage of teachers in schools. According to education authority KIs, while the number of permanent teachers has fallen in more than half (51%) of sub-prefectures, the number of parent-teachers has increased in a similar proportion (56%) in these areas. However, most parent-teachers have neither received adequate training nor the necessary qualifications to teach. They face significant economic difficulties: only 37% of schools pay a salary on a regular basis, the majority are supported by parents, and they earn around 17,516 CFA (USD 28), five times less than regular teachers. During consultations, only 60% of boys and 67% of girls said they felt safe at school, citing serious concerns around the use of corporal punishment and alcohol consumption by teachers, fighting and violence between students on the way to school and at school, and the consequences of armed conflict (attacks, the presence of armed men, and the psychological impact on their well-being). Teachers have been trained on basic psychosocial support in only 15% of assessed schools, and very few schools reported having personnel trained on identification, response to disclosures and referrals of child protection and GBV cases.

Child protection risks

Across all schooling statuses and genders, child marriage was the number one risk reported for children by community actor KIs (33% for in-school children vs 42% for out-of-school children). This risk particularly affected girls, regardless of schooling status, from the age of 12. It is worth noting that risks linked to child marriage, but also to child labor and recruitment/use of children by armed groups and forces, were relatively less mentioned for children in school, suggesting that access to education reduces child protection and GBV risks.

The two other risks most frequently mentioned by community actor KIs for children in-school were verbal or physical violence (13%), and rapes or other forms of sexual violence (12%). Two out of three main protection risks faced by children are linked with GBV. Additionally, about 17% of the educational staff reported incidents involving girls on their way to school or at school. Out of those, with physical assaults (63%) and sexual assaults by adults (20%) being commonly cited as incidents happening in school. Sexual violence on the way to school was the third most common

incident experienced by girls as reported by education staff. Adolescent girls further reported incidents of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) by education personnel in school and other forms of sexual abuse perpetrated by their own families. In an FGD with out-of-school adolescent girls, one young girl explains that "*sometimes at school, girls are asked for sexual favors in exchange for admission to a higher grade. Sometimes, even your own parent throws you into the arms of a man without your consent just because the person has given them money, food, or drinks, and in compensation for their expenses, he tells the family that he wants you in return.*"

Community actor KIs in 66% of assessed communities mentioned having heard of cases of missing children or parents who had lost their children in the three months preceding the survey. The community actor KIs in 45% of the communities stated that there were unaccompanied and separated children in their localities. The main causes of separation identified were orphanhood (80%), the death of parents during attacks (49%), and displacement (40%). When asked about the most vulnerable children in need of assistance among unaccompanied and separated children, community actor KIs identified out-of-school children as those most in need of assistance (91%), followed by children with disabilities and those cared for by the elderly (67% and 48% respectively).

Community actor KIs in 18% (12/67) of communities reported they were aware of episodes of child recruitment by armed forces and groups near or within the community in the last six months. The same key informants in a quarter of communities noted that they had seen children in the company of armed forces and groups near or within their locality. What's more, 74% of out-of-school adolescents consulted confirmed that children in their community frequent places with armed men. In particular, they cited airfields, *Minusca* bases, *Forces Armées Centrafricaines* (FACA) bases, and city entry/exit gates. 39% of teenagers said there are places in the village where children are most at risk of being recruited by armed groups. These include diamond digging sites, military bases, IDP sites, walks, trips to the river, paths leading to fields, schools, water points, armed group checkpoints, gendarmeries and police stations. According to community actor KIs, the children who are usually recruited/used by armed forces and groups are most often boys aged over 10. As solutions to preventing the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, adolescent girls and boys had plenty of ideas to contribute. Schooling, vocational training and risk awareness were the most frequently mentioned. Focus group discussion participants stressed the importance of schooling, the provision of accelerated education courses and the distribution of school kits and dignity kits.

The assessment reveals limited access to protection services in schools and communities. Only around half of communities have community protection mechanisms, and psycho-social support services are rare, with only 10% of schools offering this service to teachers and 8% to pupils. Behavioral changes among displaced and returnee children are frequently observed, underlining the urgency of improving access to psycho-social support services and protection mechanisms.

To learn more about the project visit: https://www.educationcluster.net