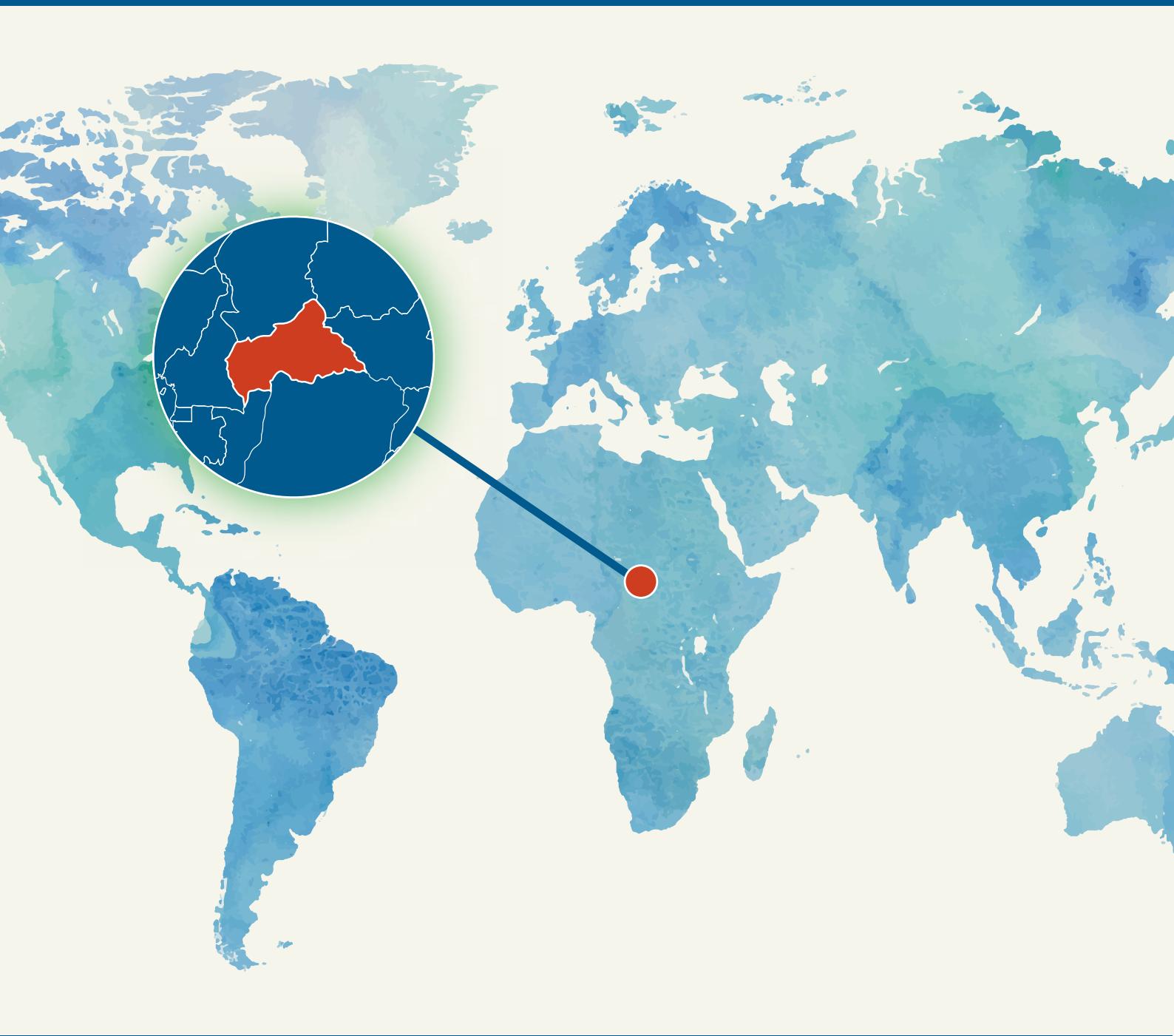# CENTRAL AFRICA REPUBIC
Violence Against Health Care in Conflict
2021

SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT

Insecurity Insight
Data on People in Danger

Letter from the Chair

During the past 18 months the list of health care systems that have been destroyed or severely compromised by war-related violence lengthened. Three-quarters of the health facilities in Ethiopia's Tigray region were destroyed or damaged in the conflict that began in November 2020. In the now-forgotten conflict in Gaza in the spring of 2021, 30 health facilities were damaged. In Myanmar the public health system has all but collapsed since the coup in February 2021, because many hospitals have been occupied by the military, while COVID-19, HIV, TB, and malaria programs stalled and 300 health workers were arrested. Then in February 2022 Russia began attacking hospitals, ambulances, and health workers during its invasion of Ukraine. By the end of April 2022, The World Health Organizations confirmed almost 200 such attacks.

The past year was marked by continued international failure to prevent such attacks and hold perpetrators to account. Governments' expressions of horror at the violence continued without being accompanied by action. By the fifth anniversary of the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2286, in which governments committed to concrete actions to prevent such attacks and increase accountability, very little had been done. Nor did the Security Council consider new course corrections to implement the resolution's requirements.

At the same time, one of the foundations of action, the WHO's systems for tracking attacks, remained inadequate to its function. Except for reporting in Myanmar and Ukraine, where widespread attention increased pressure to collect data, the system severely under-reported incidents. In Ethiopia, despite the effective destruction of the health system and the murder of health workers in Tigray region and other attacks in Afar and Amhara regions, the WHO reported zero attacks in the country for the whole of 2021. This failure no doubt contributed to the lack of global attention to the dire situation in Ethiopia. When the WHO system did report, it continued to withhold information essential to understanding what took place and where attacks occurred.

There were some advances in the area of accountability. Germany obtained a conviction of a Syrian war criminal under principles of universal jurisdiction (although not for crimes involving attacks on health care). The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) accepted Ukraine's request to investigate alleged war crimes there. But these cases did not address the continuing structural problem that permits the five permanent members of the Security Council to block certain referrals to the ICC, but nevertheless are a sign that accountability may finally be on the increase.

Perhaps 2022 will be an inflection point, as images and reports of attacks on health care and their consequences in Ukraine continue to go viral, accompanied by frequent and loud demands for accountability – but it won't be if the lassitude of the international community continues.

Len Rubenstein
Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

Methodology | Full Report

Central African Republic

> On April 2, 2021 Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) fighters looted a hospital and destroyed a bridge between Bago village and Bakouma town in the CAR's Mbomou prefecture during an attack on the civilian population.[1]

REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS

107	**40**	**29**	**16**
REPORTED INCIDENTS	**INCIDENTS WHERE HEALTH SUPPLIES WERE LOOTED**	**HEALTH WORKERS ARRESTED**	**HEALTH WORKERS INJURED**

Source: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 107 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in the CAR in 2021, compared to eight such incidents in 2020.[2] In these incidents vital medical supplies were looted, while 25 health workers were arrested, 16 were injured, and nine others were kidnapped.

This factsheet is based on the dataset <u>2021 SHCC CAR Health Data</u>, which is available for download on the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX).[3]

THE CONTEXT

After the collapse of a peace deal in December 2020 between the CAR government and a coalition of 14 armed groups known as the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), violence increased throughout the country. The CPC, which opposed the December 2020 re-election of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, carried out multiple attacks on strategic towns outside the capital, Bangui. Fighting also increased in the north-east of the country, as clashes among former Séléka alliance militia groups occurred along ethnic lines. Meanwhile, the growing presence of private military companies (PMCs) in the CAR, including the Russian Wagner Group PMC, have been accused of carrying out attacks and thus increasing instability. In December 2021 the EU imposed sanctions on the Wagner Group and stated that EU countries will no longer train CAR soldiers due to links between the PMC and the CAR armed forces.
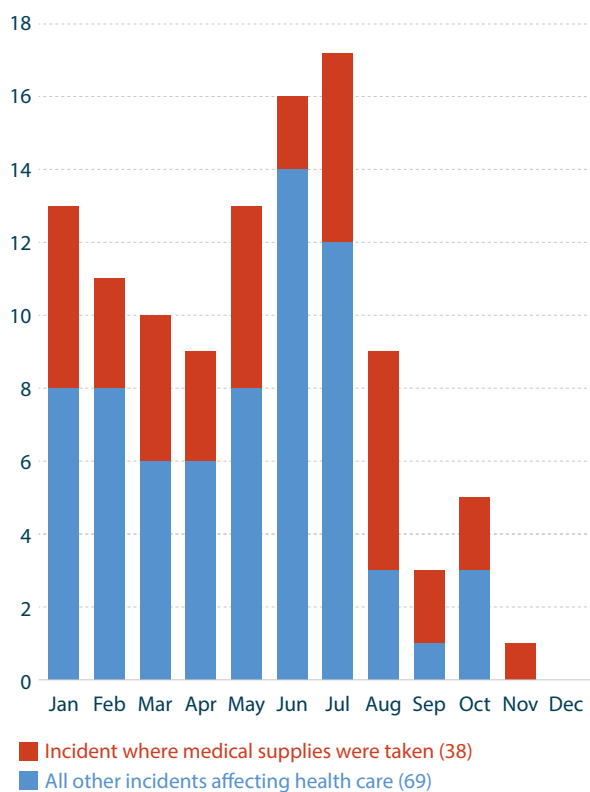
The increase in violence has led to a widespread increase in the number of IDPs. OCHA has stated that the humanitarian emergency in the CAR has *'reached levels not seen since 2015 due to the new conflict dynamics.'*[4]

Central African Republic

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2021

Reported incidents affecting health care in the CAR in 2021, by month

Throughout 2021 vital medical supplies were taken from health facilities and ambulances

Incident where medical supplies were taken (38)
All other incidents affecting health care (69)

Overall, 107 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care were reported in the CAR in 2021, compared to eight in 2020. This increase in incidents in 2021 is likely due to difficulties in reporting incidents caused by COVID-19-related travel restrictions between the country's regions throughout 2020. Because many areas in the CAR are not covered by phone networks or the internet, information flows depend on site visits, which were significantly reduced throughout 2020.

Incidents were particularly high during the first seven months of 2021 after the collapse of the peace talks in December 2020.[5]

Throughout 2021 vital medical supplies were stolen and looted from health facilities and ambulances carrying health workers traveling to provide health care to remote areas of the country.

Sixteen health workers were injured in road ambushes and during robberies at health facilities in 2021. In the majority of these cases, however, health workers and patients were unharmed. In one case in June, a woman, her baby, and a female caregiver who were being transported for referral by two motorcycle riders hired by an INGO and clearly identified by the INGO logo were ambushed near Batangafo town, Ouham prefecture. The female caregiver was shot and killed, and the mother, her baby, and one motorcycle rider were wounded.[6]

At least 25 health workers were arrested or detained in 2021. Health workers were frequently detained on their own or together with other colleague while traveling to and from health facilities.

PERPETRATORS

Members of various known groups such as Anti-Balaka; Ex-Séléka; the Central African Armed Forces (FACA); the CPC; law enforcement agencies; the Wagner Group; and Return, Complaint and Rehabilitation (3R), as well as members of various unidentified non-state armed groups were reported to have perpetrated violence against or obstructed health care in the CAR in 2021.[7] In most cases these perpetrators were armed with firearms.

CPC fighters in Mbomou prefecture stole medical supplies from health facilities, including an INGO-supported facility, on three occasions in February, March, and April.[8] During the incident in April **CPC** fighters looted a hospital and destroyed a bridge between Bakouma town and Bago village. In July members

of the group also stole medical supplies from health facilities in Ouaka prefecture and in August in Mambéré-Kadéï prefecture.[9] In August **CPC** fighters stole supplies from a health vehicle in Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture.[10]

A health worker was injured in a July attack on a health facility by **CPC** fighters in Basse-Kotto prefecture and another was kidnapped in Ouham prefecture in January. The status of the kidnapped worker remains unclear.[11]

On two occasions health facilities were impacted by violence during **clashes between non-state armed groups and government forces** in Ouaka prefecture. In February bullets and explosives from violent clashes hit an MSF medical tent, wounding at least eight women and nine children.[12]

In Elevage IDP camp, Ouaka prefecture an MSF-supported health post providing malaria treatment, as well as tents and shops, were burnt and destroyed during fighting between **non-state armed groups and government forces** in June.[13]

In Mbaiki city, Lobaye prefecture, **FACA** soldiers detained an INGO ambulance in January and looted medical supplies from a pharmacy in Bambari town, Ouaka prefecture in October.[14]

PMC members in Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture stole medical supplies from an INGO health facility in March and detained a health worker who was traveling in an ambulance in Haute-Kotto prefecture in May.[15] The **Russia-linked Wagner Group PMC, supported by FACA troops**, attacked a village in Bossangoa district, Ouham prefecture in October and looted a health center. Shops were also destroyed, livestock was stolen, and three civilians were killed in the attack.[16]

Members of **unidentified non-state armed group** ambushed a vehicle transporting an INGO health worker and two patients in Ouham prefecture in June.[17] In Ouaka prefecture, an armed group took medical supplies from a health facility in September.[18]

Anti-Balaka fighters stole medical supplies from a health vehicle in Kouango town, Ouaka prefecture in August.[19]

Ex-Séléka fighters robbed a health post and injured two health workers in Ndélé town, Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture in January.[20]

Law enforcement officers arrested two health workers in Bambari town in April.[21] Reports suggest that medical supplies were taken from the staff during their arrest.

3R fighters ambushed health workers traveling in Nana-Mambéré prefecture in August. Three health workers were injured, and medical supplies were stolen.[22]

Central African Republic

IMPACT ON HEALTH SYSTEMS AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Health services

The ongoing conflict has damaged or partially destroyed one-third of the country's 1,008 health facilities. As of October 2021, only 22% of health facilities were functioning, while by the end of May 2021, 77 nutrition units – one in five – were closed.[23] MSF temporarily suspended its activities following attacks on its staff and services.[24] Essential drugs and equipment were often unavailable because violence had disrupted supply chains.

On several occasions large numbers of people arrived at hospital compounds to take refuge there, believing these compounds to be places of safety, leading to further strains on the provision of medical care.[25]

Access to health care

Due to the widespread violence and the other drivers of the CAR's health crisis more than half the country's population was in need of assistance to be able to access health care, i.e. an estimated 2.7 million people out of a total population of 4.9 million.[26]

Young mothers and newborns were at risk either because no medical care was available or because pregnant women were too fearful to make the journey to hospital. Survivors of sexual violence also faced difficulties in accessing care in the required time frame, leaving many women and girls with permanent physical injuries and psychological damage.[27]

1   Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 27632.
2   *https://shcc.pub/2021SHCCCAR*.
3   Ninety-one incidents that had not been reported elsewhere were reported the WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA). Reports on 16 additional incidents that had not been reported elsewhere were provided by the Conflict and Humanitarian Data Centre (CHDC) of the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO).
4   *https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-situation-report-30-november-2021*.
5   By January 15, 2021, the WHO SSA had reported no incidents in the CAR for 2020, but since then the number of incidents has risen to 19. On April 7, 2022, the WHO SSA reported that 91 incidents had occurred in 2021.
6   Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 28534.
7   Details on the perpetrators were recorded in 28 incidents. The identities of the perpetrators of 19 incidents are unclear.
8   Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 884; 885; 27632.
9   Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 889; 8816.
10 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 8811.
11 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 8810; 881.
12 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 27094.
13 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 28335.
14 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 882; 885.
15 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 886; 8888.
16 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 30020.
17 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 28534.
18 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 8814.
19 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 8813.
20 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 883.
21 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 887.
22 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2022 Report Dataset: 2021 SHCC CAR Health Data. Incident number 8812.
23 *https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/central-african-republic/document/rca-aper%C3%A7u-des-besoins-humanitaires-hno-2022*.
24 *https://www.msf.ch/nos-actualites/communiques-presse/republique-centrafricaine-attaques-repetees-contre-services*.
25 *https://prezly.msf.org.uk/central-african-republic-repeated-attacks-on-medical-care-leave-people-vulnerable-to-disease-and-death?gclid=Cj0KCQiAmpyRBhC-ARIsABs2EAotgKGlpUAB1q0ixUh6VCpzoVkMnpFOnK_McFBkQkvkwsX95kc0e_4aAqkJEALw_wcB*; *https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/forgotten-crises-healthcare-central-african-republic*.
26 *https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/central-african-republic/document/rca-aper%C3%A7u-des-besoins-humanitaires-hno-2022*.
27 *https://msf.org.uk/article/central-african-republic-healing-visible-and-invisible-wounds-sexual-violence*.

SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition is a group of more than 40 organizations working to protect health workers and services threatened by war or civil unrest. We have raised awareness of global attacks on health and pressed United Nations agencies for greater global action to protect the security of health care. We monitor attacks, strengthen universal norms of respect for the right to health, and demand accountability for perpetrators. www.safeguardinghealth.org

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