



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)
Main subject	Overview of the conflict and situation of Muslims
Question(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Overview of the conflict in CAR and latest developments (2019-2021)2. Situation of Muslims in Bangui (including Muslims of foreign descent)3. Capacity and effectiveness of MINUSCA's peacekeeping and humanitarian mission
Date of completion	20 December 2021
Query Code	Q57-2021
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	N/A

Disclaimer

This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#) and [EASO Writing and Referencing Guide](#).

The information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. All sources used are referenced. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The information in the response does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EASO and makes no political statement whatsoever.

The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on 20 December 2021. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

COI QUERY RESPONSE – Central African Republic (CAR)

Overview of the conflict and situation of Muslims

1. Overview of the conflict in CAR and latest developments (2019-2021)

The Central African Republic (CAR) is located in the centre of Africa and its capital city is Bangui.¹ The majority of people living in CAR are Christians (of whom 61 % are estimated to be Protestant and 28 % Catholic); 9 % of the population is Muslim, and about 2 % belongs to other religious minorities, including traditional or no religious beliefs.²

Since declaring independence from France in 1960, the country has been unstable.³ During 2013, violence erupted, with rival Muslim and Christian armed groups fighting each other, launching attacks against the civilian population, and killing hundreds of people.⁴ As noted by Al Jazeera, the fighting took place between ‘the mainly Muslim Seleka fighters – originally from neighbouring Chad and Sudan – and the Christian anti-Balaka, whose name means “anti-machete,” the weapon of choice for Seleka’.⁵ In 2014, the UN denounced the worsening strife in CAR ‘with its Muslim-Christian overtones risks escalating into sustained violence along religious lines and spilling beyond the country’s borders, further destabilizing the whole region’.⁶

In the aftermath of the 2013 violence, 80 % of the Muslim population fled to Cameroon and Chad. In 2018, it was reported that ‘the return of Muslim minorities back to CAR has been very slowly ever since and the remaining Muslim minorities predominately live in the peacekeeper-protected enclaves’.⁷

Since 2013, CAR has been in a state of protracted crisis, experiencing continuous fighting of varying intensity. During December 2020, a new escalation of violence erupted in the run-up to the 2020 national elections, ‘following a major spike in political tensions exacerbated by the decision of the country’s Constitutional Court to block former President Francois Bozizé from running in elections scheduled to take place on 27 December’. Fighting between a coalition of armed groups and government and UN forces took place just 150 km from the capital Bangui.⁸ On 15 October 2021 the president of CAR declared ‘an immediate and unilateral ceasefire across the Country’.⁹

However, as of November 2021, clashes continued to occur in the country. As reported by USAID:

¹ O’Toole T.E., et al., Central African Republic, in Encyclopedia Britannica, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

² USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

³ BBC, Central African Republic country profile, 1 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴ BBC, Central African Republic country profile, 1 August 2018, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Central African Republic, n.d., [url](#)

⁵ Al Jazeera, Dozens killed as fresh fighting erupts in CAR, 21 December 2013, [url](#)

⁶ UN News, Strife in Central African Republic could turn into religious war and spill over borders, UN warns, 6 January 2014, [url](#)

⁷ Forbes, The Religious War In The Central African Republic Continues, 9 May 2018, [url](#)

⁸ International Crisis Group, Saving the Central African Republic’s Elections and Averting Another Cycle of Violence, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹ UNSC, The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, Report of the Secretary-General, 26 November 2021, [url](#), p. 2

‘However, Russian bilateral forces¹⁰ attacked Ouham Prefecture’s Benzambé town on October 16, which resulted in the deaths of at least three civilians and caused significant property damage and population displacement, the UN reports. Additionally, a November 16 clash between the Armed Forces of CAR (FACA) and armed actors in Ouham-Pende Prefecture’s Mann town resulted in the deaths of at least 11 civilians, according to international media. Such clashes and other forms of insecurity in CAR continue to generate and exacerbate humanitarian needs among affected populations.’¹¹

The United States Department of State (USDOS) noted, that during 2020, government exercised control in the capital Bangui and its immediate surroundings. However, the ‘government continued to exercise limited or no control or influence in most of the country, which observers said was due largely to the presence of armed groups, including the ex-Seleka, a grouping of predominantly Muslim armed groups, and the anti-Balaka, a grouping of predominantly Christian armed groups.’ The government, however, exercised control in in the capital Bangui and its immediate surroundings.¹²

As of 31 October 2021, there were 664 000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) among the CAR population, and 735 000 Central African refugees.¹³ The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported that ‘recurring violence, persistent shocks and the degradation of basic services have significantly worsened the living conditions of Central Africans in 2021’.¹⁴ Further, the latest report on ‘Education Under Attack in West and Central Africa’ of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that the Armed violence in the country ‘is having a devastating impact on children’s survival, education, protection and development’.¹⁵

2. Situation of Muslims in Bangui (including Muslims of foreign descent)

During the time frame for responding to this COI Query and amongst all the available sources consulted, scarce information was found regarding the situation of Muslims in Bangui in particular, (including Muslims of foreign descent). However, general information on the situation of Muslims in Central African Republic is presented below.

As noted by USDOS, 9 % of the Central African population is Muslim.¹⁶ Furthermore:

‘In the central and southern regions of the country, Catholicism and Protestant Christianity are the dominant religions, while Islam is predominant in the northeast. In Bangui, the majority of inhabitants in the PK5 and PK3 neighborhoods are Muslim, while other neighborhoods in the capital are predominantly Christian’.¹⁷

The constitution of CAR ‘provides freedom of religion under conditions set by law and equal protection under the law regardless of religion. It prohibits all forms of religious intolerance and “religious fundamentalism” but does not define these terms’.¹⁸ Additionally:

¹⁰ In 2020, international actors, such as Russia and Rwanda stepped in into the CAR conflict, by sending hundreds of troops in support of the CAR government. A brief analysis on the role of Russia in CAR can be found in International Crisis Group, Russia’s Influence in the Central African Republic, 3 December 2021, [url](#)

¹¹ USAID, Central African Republic, Complex Emergency, 23 November 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹² USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 4, 6

¹³ OCHA, Central African Republic, Situation Report, last updated 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁴ OCHA, Central African Republic, Situation Report, last updated 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁵ UNHCR, Education Under Attack in West and Central Africa, October 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶ USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷ USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸ USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

‘Religious groups, except for indigenous religious groups, are required to register with the Ministry of the Interior, Public Security, and Territorial Administration. To register, religious groups must prove they have a minimum of 1,000 members and their leaders have adequate religious education, as judged by the ministry.’¹⁹

The USDOS report noted that, during 2020, ‘many Muslims, the principal religious minority in the country, remained displaced in the western part of the country, where according to media reports, they were not allowed to practice their religion freely.’ The same source noted that ‘traditional and social media outlets continued to feature hate speech, which in many cases negatively portrayed Muslims.’²⁰

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) explained that as the majority of CAR’s refugee population is Muslims the ‘Muslim Central Africans [consequently] have faced disproportionate challenges in registering to vote and were underrepresented in December’s national elections’ because²¹ According to USCIRF, the Muslim Central African population faced “opportunistic” discrimination from local officials.²² Namely, as USCIRF reported, people with “Muslim-sounding names” payed higher fees when ‘they register to vote or register for their national identification cards’.²³

Citing a Muslim advocacy group as their source, the USDOS reported the said source ‘documented Muslims being subjected to arbitrary and long pretrial detentions by the government when the government pursued majority-Muslim armed groups.’²⁴ An article by BBC in September 2021 reported that Muslim population in CAR continue to face ‘state’s long-term and violent discrimination’, including obstacles in obtaining identification documents; interrogations by gendarmes, more frequent than Christians ‘while moving on the road between Bangui and neighboring Cameroon’; lack of representation and marginalization in the public sphere, hate speech and negative portraiture in ‘traditional and social media outlets’; and general security concerns ‘which hampered their ability to move freely throughout the country’.²⁵

3. Capacity and effectiveness of MINUSCA’s peacekeeping and humanitarian mission

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) was deployed in the Central African Republic in 2014, right after the breakout of violence in 2013. The mission faces various challenges in implementing its mandate as it is targeted by armed groups.²⁶

Some tasks of MINUSCA’s role in CAR include training of police officers, international peacekeepers and members of Central African Armed Forces (FACA), rehabilitation of prison centers; ‘protect the civilian population from physical violence within its capabilities and areas of deployment’, assist to the setup of the Special Criminal Court (SCC) ‘victim and witness protection unit’;²⁷ providing good offices in support of the February 2019 peace agreement, assisting with the 2020-21 elections; protecting UN personnel and infrastructure, extending and building state authority; monitoring

¹⁹ USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

²⁰ USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 2- 6

²¹ USCIRF, Country Update: Central African Republic, Religious Freedom Conditions in CAR, June 2021, [url](#), p. 3

²² USCIRF, Country Update: Central African Republic, Religious Freedom Conditions in CAR, June 2021, [url](#), p. 3

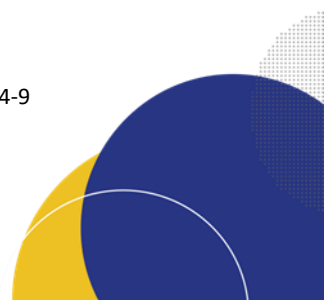
²³ USCIRF, Country Update: Central African Republic, Religious Freedom Conditions in CAR, June 2021, [url](#), p. 3

²⁴ USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

²⁵ BBC, Central African Republic war: No-go zones and Russian meddling, 23 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁶ USCIRF, Central African Republic, Tier 1, 25 April 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷ USDOS, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practises: Central African Republic, 30 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 4-9



human rights, enabling humanitarian aid delivery and assisting the Panel of Experts in monitoring the weapons trade and collecting information about violence and incitement to violence.²⁸

USDOS report on Religious Freedom stated that, during 2020:

‘The United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) remained the only force capable of maintaining security in much of the country, according to peacekeeping experts, but MINUSCA stated it remained hampered in its ability to protect civilians due to an increase of electoral violence and the closure of the main supply routes in December as well as limited resources and personnel and poor infrastructure.’²⁹

After the escalation of violence in December 2020, the ‘access for humanitarian organisations has shrunk in many areas, exacerbating the already extreme vulnerability of hundreds of thousands of people’.³⁰ The International Peace Institute (IPINST) supported that

‘MINUSCA now confronts a more challenging environment compared with the period leading up to last year’s mandate renewal, particularly in the aftermath of the January 2021 armed rebellion that swept toward the capital, Bangui, following presidential elections in December 2020’.³¹

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in coordination with MINUSCA, reported that during the period July 2020- June 2021:

‘MINUSCA endured tensions, and even hostilities, from civil society, the population and State agents, resulting, inter alia, in several violations of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that governs relations between the Central African Republic and MINUSCA. These tensions impacted the smooth running of MINUSCA’s activities in general, and the HRD, in particular’.³²

²⁸ MINUSCA, Mandate, n.d., [url](#)

²⁹ USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰ Al Jazeera, Bambari: A mirror of the crisis in the Central African Republic, 5 October 2021, [url](#)

³¹ IPINST, Prioritization and Sequencing of Security Council Mandates: The Case of MINUSCA, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

³² OHCHR and MINUSCA, Public Report on Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law in the Central African Republic during the Electoral Period, July 2020 – June 2021, June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

SOURCES USED

Al Jazeera, Dozens killed as fresh fighting erupts in CAR, 21 December 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/12/21/dozens-killed-as-fresh-fighting-erupts-in-car>, accessed 16 December 2021

Al Jazeera, Bambari: A mirror of the crisis in the Central African Republic, 5 October 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2021/10/5/photos-central-african-republic-bambari-nzacko-two-mirrors-of-the-crisis-in-car>, accessed 17 December 2021

BBC, Central African Republic country profile, 1 August 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13150040>, accessed 13 December 2021

BBC, Central African Republic war: No-go zones and Russian meddling, 23 September 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58641124>, accessed 17 December 2021

Forbes, The Religious War In The Central African Republic Continues, 9 May 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/05/09/the-religious-war-in-central-african-republic-continues/?sh=1fc5b48c3c0d>, accessed 17 December 2021

International Crisis Group, Central African Republic, n.d., <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic>, accessed 16 December 2021

International Crisis Group, Saving the Central African Republic's Elections and Averting Another Cycle of Violence, 22 December 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/saving-central-african-republics-elections-and-averting-another-cycle-violence>, accessed 16 December 2021

International Crisis Group, Russia's Influence in the Central African Republic, 3 December 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/russias-influence-central-african-republic>, accessed 17 December 2021

IPINST (International Peace Institute), Prioritization and Sequencing of Security Council Mandates: The Case of MINUSCA, 5 November 2021, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2111_The-Case-of-MINUSCA2021-PDF.pdf, accessed 17 December 2021

MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic), Mandate, n.d., <https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/mandate>, accessed 17 December 2021

OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Central African Republic, Situation Report, last updated 15 December 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/car/>, accessed 16 December 2021

OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) and MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central Africa Republic), Public Report on Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law in the Central African Republic during the Electoral Period, July 2020 – June 2021, June 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CF/report_abuses_violations_HR_InternationalHumanitarianLaw_Elections_CAR_EN.pdf, accessed 17 December 2021

O'Toole T.E., et al., Central African Republic, in Encyclopedia Britannica, 16 June 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Central-African-Republic/Economy>, accessed 13 December 2021

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for the refugees), Education Under Attack in West and Central Africa, October 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/wca_educationssdadvocacynotesen_20211025.pdf, accessed 16 December 2021

UN News, Strife in Central African Republic could turn into religious war and spill over borders, UN warns, 6 January 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/01/459152#.Usw2CPRDsqQ> accessed 16 December 2021

UNSC (United Nations Security Council), The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2021/975, 26 November 2021, <https://undocs.org/en/S/2021/975>, accessed 16 December 2021

USAID (United States Agency for International Development), Central African Republic, Complex Emergency, 23 November 2021, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2021-11-23_USG_Central_African_Republic_Complex_Emergency_Fact_Sheet_1.pdf, accessed 16 December 2021

USCIRF (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom), Central African Republic, Tier 1, 25 April 2018, https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_CAR.pdf, accessed 17 December 2021

USCIRF (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom), Country Update: Central African Republic, Religious Freedom Conditions in CAR, June 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2058627/2021+Central+African+Region+Country+Update.pdf>, accessed 16 December 2021

USDOS (United States Department of State), 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practises: Central African Republic, 30 March 2021, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CENTRAL-AFRICAN-REPUBLIC-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>, accessed 17 December 2021

USDOS (United States Department of State), 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Central African Republic, 12 May 2021, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/240282-CENTRAL-AFRICAN-REPUBLIC-2020-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>, accessed 16 December 2021