



IRC in Central African Republic (CAR): Overview of the Child and Youth Protection and Development Program - CYPD

Children in CAR

Children in CAR have the right to develop and achieve their potential. In CAR, children (under 18 years old) represent 49.8% of the population.¹ 51% of them are girls and 49% are boys. The family, school, and community are all environments where children experience different types of violence including physical, sexual, or psychological. Whether internally displaced or from host communities, children in CAR experience a high level of vulnerability to protection incidents that do not favor their full development.

IRC CAR Child Protection Program

Vision

By 2025, our vision is that 80% of children and their families in IRC's areas of intervention in CAR live in a protective environment and have improved well-being through IRC's child protection program interventions.

IRC in CAR

IRC has been present in CAR since 2006. In CAR, IRC provides support to vulnerable children, including unaccompanied and separated children, child survivors of abuse and exploitation, and children associated with armed forces and groups (CAAFAG).

OUR AREAS OF INTERVENTION

IRC in CAR intervenes in the most remote areas where the needs are intervening in order to respond to the most acute needs of children and their families:

- **Prefecture of Ouham-Péché** : - Sub-prefecture of : Bocaranga, Kouï
- **Prefecture of Nana-Gribizi** - Subprefecture of : Kaga Bandoro
- **Prefecture of Ombella-M'poko and Bangui** Sub-prefecture of : Boali, Behere, Bondokpo ;
- **Prefecture of Haut-Mbomou** - Sub-prefecture of Zemio.

The protection program aims to protect children from various forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and misuse through :

- personalized support for children according to their protection needs
- Contributing to the realization of their rights so that they are safe in their living environments.
- changing social norms.



Context of the CAR

CAR has suffered from decades of lack of peace and inclusiveness. At the heart of this absence is the profound deterioration of relations between and within ethnic groups, as well as the lack of a positive relationship between the population and local, provincial and national authorities. OCHA estimates the number of children in need of protection at 944,000 (51% girls and 49% boys), an increase of 4% from 2021.¹

Serious violations of children's human rights continued to occur throughout the country, including the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups.

In these conditions, children are victims of violence, abuse and exploitation. They are among others :

- Separated and unaccompanied children
- Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, physical and psychological
- EAFGA and survivors of all kinds of abuse.

IRC's child welfare program focuses on four outcome areas:

- (1)** preventing violence and improving the safety of children in environments such as the home and community,
- (2)** family strengthening, including the socio-economic reintegration of children into families and communities and the prevention of child recruitment,
- (3)** the protection of children in schools, and
- (4)** protection of children in emergency situations (e.g., conflicts, epidemics).

In all of these areas, IRC program interventions focus on responding to harm, for example through case management, as well as using an integrated, family and community-based approach to prevent and respond to harm when it occurs, for example through safe healing and learning spaces, parenting interventions, and community-based child protection work.

What are the child welfare outcome areas?

1. SECURITY - Children are safe in their communities and supported when they are harmed. In CAR, IRC has made it a priority to achieve this outcome area. As such, the child protection program ensures that children and their families are safe and cared for in an environment that promotes their well-being, and that they receive support when they

¹ General population reference 2003

experience harm. To achieve this, the program focuses on preventing and responding to violence and addressing its root causes, while fostering an environment in which children can live, learn, develop and thrive. In fact, this approach is at the heart of all IRC child protection interventions implemented in CAR.

2. Strengthening families, including the socio-economic reintegration of children into families and communities and the prevention of child recruitment: Children need a safe, loving, and protective environment so that they can develop their full potential and thrive in society. Therefore, IRC supports parents, caregivers, and families to help strengthen a protective, nonviolent environment in which children can grow up happy and healthy.

3. Child protection in emergencies (CPiE): Armed conflict in CAR constantly exposes children to protection risks and further weakens protection mechanisms. The CPiE approach is therefore an essential component of IRC's child protection program in CAR.

How does IRC respond to child protection violations?

In CAR, IRC responds to child protection violations through the following approaches:

CHILD-CENTERED APPROACH

1. Child Protection Case Management: To ensure the immediate safety of children and address their specific protection needs, the IRC Child Protection Program provides child protection case management services to children eligible for case management. An emergency fund also exists to support particularly vulnerable and urgent **cases** in need with non-food items, food items, and payment for vital services.

2. Care for child survivors of sexual violence: IRC is expanding to provide specialized case management services for child survivors of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence, supported by child protection workers trained to respond to child sexual abuse cases in humanitarian settings. Throughout the case management process, close coordination is maintained with all relevant sectors, including IRC's Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE), Health, and Economic Recovery and Development (ERD) departments.

3. Alternative Care and Family Reunification: Working closely with local NGOs and community-based child protection networks (RECOPE), IRC supports the reunification of children separated from their caregivers, including children released from armed groups. Pending family reunification, children are placed with foster families who have been pre-screened, trained, and supported to ensure that they are able to provide quality care to children during this difficult time in their lives.

Family and community strengthening

IRC, through its child protection program, strengthens families and communities to help prevent child protection violations and respond to them when they occur. As such, the approaches used can be both "preventive" and "preventive and reactive" when violence occurs.

1. Wellness and Learning Spaces (WLS): A WLS is a safe and caring space where children aged 6-11 can heal, learn, and feel protected. Within the SHLS, IRC RCA trains community facilitators commonly referred to as volunteers to implement social-emotional learning (SEL) sessions for children. The SEL program is tailored to the specific intervention context to help children effectively acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

2. Parenting Interventions: To help strengthen families to prevent and respond to child welfare violations, IRC implements parenting interventions. We know from the evidence that parenting interventions can reduce child maltreatment, improve the parent-child relationship, and support children with psychosocial needs.

3. The Strengthening Protection and Reintegration for Children (SPARC) parenting approach through the Becoming Strong Together program. Specifically, the CAR child protection team helped pilot a BHA-funded research program for parents and caregivers to prevent child recruitment and to promote and strengthen the reintegration, well-being, and protection of children after they have been recruited into armed groups (EAFGA) so that they can reach their full potential. This project highlighted the need to better engage with caregivers of formerly recruited children to achieve meaningful reintegration at home and in the community. CAR programs continue to implement this approach.

Depending on the specific needs of the families, IRC also trains and supports parents and caregivers to conduct income-generating activities/small businesses. The goal here is to facilitate a family environment where children's basic needs can be met and do not lead them to resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as joining or returning to armed groups.

4. Teen and Parent Programming: Another important component of IRC's family and community strengthening work focuses on programming for adolescents and their parents. As part of this, IRC implements the Supporting Adolescents and their Families in Emergencies (SAFE) program, which aims to help adolescent girls and boys (ages 10-19) feel safer, more



supported, and better equipped with positive coping strategies in acute emergencies.

This program encourages the active participation of adolescents and the development of their basic life skills to support positive coping and resiliency by building a variety of skills, such as self-reflection, trusting strengths rather than focusing on injuries, empathy, and functioning and belonging in a collective system. It is designed for teens and their parents.

5. Youth Socio-vocational Development: For adolescents who may not be able to return to school due to long periods of absence from school, or a lack of basic literacy, IRC aims to prevent and reduce urgent protection risks through life and vocational skills training. For example, IRC implements the "Learn to Earn" adolescent intervention, adapted to the CAR context, which combines youth self-esteem and communication skills while teaching participants how to take advantage of market opportunities in their communities, connecting them with business owners and providing cash or kits to those who are able to generate income. To complement this program, IRC also helps teens participate in job training over several months and trains mentors to work with the teens and monitor their small businesses.

6. Community work, including outreach, education, and community engagement: IRC in CAR, for greater effectiveness, works with:

- **RECOPE:** Community Child Protection Networks composed of men and women committed to the cause of children
- **Youth Clubs:** These are girls/boys who decide to get together to do activities for themselves, their school, their village or for other peers.
- **Youth:** IRC plans to experiment with collaboration with youth to help them develop social and economic projects that will allow them to participate in the development of their communities
- **Service providers:** IRC builds the capacity of other actors in other sectors to enhance the quality of their interventions in accordance with minimum protection standards. These include health workers and teachers who provide services to children as part of their duties.

As part of this effort, IRC CAR is building their capacity and commitment to address child protection needs in terms of child protection awareness and education as well as case identification and reporting.

IRC's global child protection programs aim to ensure that children are safe, able to exercise their rights, and cared for, ideally in a family or family-like environment that promotes their physical, social, emotional, cognitive and economic well-being. For more information on IRC's global child protection work, visit <https://childprotectionpractitioners.org>

7. Access to birth certificates through awareness raising for birth registration, facilitating access to civil status services and the establishment of substitute judgments during mobile courts for birth certificates.

Coordination

In CAR, IRC is an active member of the coordination bodies in our intervention zones:

- Child Protection Sub-Cluster
- Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) of CSEP
- Case Management Working Group
- Children Associated with Forces and Weapons Groups Working Group

Collaboration with State services: Our interventions are in line with national policies and the legal framework of the State:

- National Child Protection Policy
- The protection code
- National Youth Policy

Respect for the safeguarding of children is a shared commitment for everyone working with IRC. IRC ensures strict adherence to safeguarding measures in all its interventions.

NEXT STEPS

- Strengthen the national child protection system in CAR to improve the quality of services provided to children and to better support child survivors of sexual violence
- Strengthen the capitalization of our methodological approaches with children and adolescents
- Strengthen the prevention of violations of children's rights in relation to GBV.
- Build on the existing capacity of local child protection staff, local NGOs, and community child protection actors to develop quality child protection programs and help more children in need.
- Continuously learn from other countries, actors and interventions and adapt learning to the local context.
- Quality Assurance: Continue to have a qualified team of trainers

Some of our funders:



KLINSKY- Private lessor