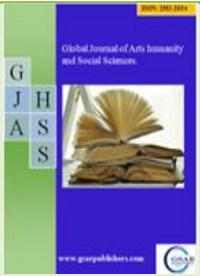
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The Influx of Central African Refugees and Security Threats in the East Region of Cameroon since 2013: Causes, Government's Responses and Challenges

By

Emmanuel Yenkong Sobseh, PhD¹, Canute Ambe Ngwa, PhD²

^{1,2}The University of Bamenda, Cameroon



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Corresponding author
**Emmanuel Yenkong
Sobseh, PhD**

Abstract

Cameroon has a long-standing history of hosting refugees and is among the largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa. The influx of refugees from the Central African Republic into the East Region of Cameroon, coupled with internal conflicts, presents a complex humanitarian and security challenge for the country. Most refugees and asylum-seekers from Central African Republic fled widespread violence from 2013 onwards, with the majority arriving in Cameroon in 2014 and 2015. The study examines the causes of this refugee influx, the government's responses, and the resulting security threats and challenges. The primary driver is the ongoing conflict and instability in the Central African Republic, forcing people to seek refuge in neighbouring Cameroon. The Cameroonian government faces strain on its resources and infrastructure, and as such has implemented a multifaceted response by providing humanitarian assistance, establishing refugee camps, and working with international organizations. The paper argues that, the government's actions are often limited by resource constraints and the challenges of integrating large numbers of refugees into existing communities. It further highlights the fact that, the influx has created security risks, including potential for criminal activities, clashes between refugees and local communities, and the possibility of refugee camps being used as bases for armed groups. The challenges are multifaceted, however, the government needs to find sustainable solutions to the root causes of the refugee crisis, address the needs of both refugees and host communities, and provide security to all residents in the East Region. This paper that made use of primary and secondary sources of data concludes that, the success of addressing this refugee crisis and security threats hinge on a concerted effort by the Cameroonian government, international organizations, and the international community, especially as Cameroon generally has an open-door policy for refugees fleeing violence in neighbouring countries.

KeyWords: Refugees Crisis, Security Threats, Government Responses, Challenges, CAR, Cameroon

1. INTRODUCTION

Cameroon has a long history of hosting refugees, beginning in 1972, when it temporarily hosted 200,000 refugees fleeing Equatorial Guinea. The President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, frequently invokes this history of generously hosting refugees and asylum seekers as a point of pride (International Rescue Committee, 2019: 8). Recently, Cameroon faces three forced displacement situations: refugees from Nigeria and Internally

Displaced Persons (IDPs) who fled Boko Haram violence in the Far North region, refugees from Central African Republic in the East Region, and IDPs in the North West and South West Regions. The Government of Cameroon has adopted relatively progressive refugee policies, guaranteeing refugees' freedom of movement, the right to work, and the right to access healthcare and education equivalent to Cameroonian citizens. Despite these policies, households in refugee-hosting areas are disproportionately poor: they comprise 66 percent of poor households, but only 38 percent



of the national population (Barbelet, 2017a). The extent to which refugees are integrated with host communities varies greatly by region. Most Central African Republic refugees (69 percent) are integrated into villages with host communities, rather than refugee-dedicated areas.

Central African refugees have come to Cameroon as a result of two crises. The first followed rising violence in rural areas sparked by a coup in 2003. The second was prompted by another round of violence culminating in another coup in March 2013. The first wave of refugees mainly comprised pastoral Mbororos, who had fled rural areas to escape banditry and kidnapping. The second wave were mainly urban-dwelling Muslim traders (both Hausa and Fulbe), alongside a minority of Christians from urban centres (Barbelet, 2017b). Some refugees from the Central African Republic have been displaced for over a decade, and the political and security situation in the Central African Republic has not improved sufficiently to warrant their return. Initially, refugees from the Central African Republic arrived slowly throughout the mid-2000s. Renewed violence in 2013 spurred a sudden flow of refugees across the border (UNCHR, 2019). While the rate of new arrivals from the Central African Republic decreased from 2014 to 2017 (Ibid.), violence in the Central African Republic intensified in 2018, resulting in nearly 25,000 Central African Republic refugees crossing into Cameroon that year (UNHCR, 2018).

Previous literature and research by scholars focused more on the meaning and experiences of refugee's local integration policy within Cameroonian context. It is crucial to note that limited literatures are available on this subject matter as per the framework of this paper, hence, the needs to explore further. The integration mechanisms are addressed more in-depth by scholars like Ager and Strang (2008). Their framework is built on four conceptual levels, illustrating the possibilities of integration in a given refugee host nation that include; Markers and Means of Integration (Employment, Housing, Education, Health), Social Connection (Social Bridges, Social Bonds, Social Links), Facilitators (Language and Cultural Knowledge, Stability and Safety), and a Foundational level (Rights and Citizenship), (Ager and Strang 2008: 178). Evette Lee (1966) model is more connected to these cited factors. She suggested, migration processes are determined by four groups of factors: origin-related (push factors; political), destination-related (pull factors; socio-cultural), personal factors and intervening obstacles (such as difficulties and cost of transportation; economic). Her model is one of the first attempts to formulate a theory on refugee movements used to understand why people move from one place to another either voluntarily or involuntarily. Goodwin-Gill (1989) also traced the emergencies and development of the concept of international protection of refugees from the League of Nations through the period of international refugee's organization and to the practice by UNHCR and States by comparing their integrative and protective roles, while Narcisse Mouelle Kombi (1986) on refugee status alongside the government, goes beyond the legal framework of protecting refugees by reflecting on the characteristics of the above-listed factors. A documentary review on the protection and

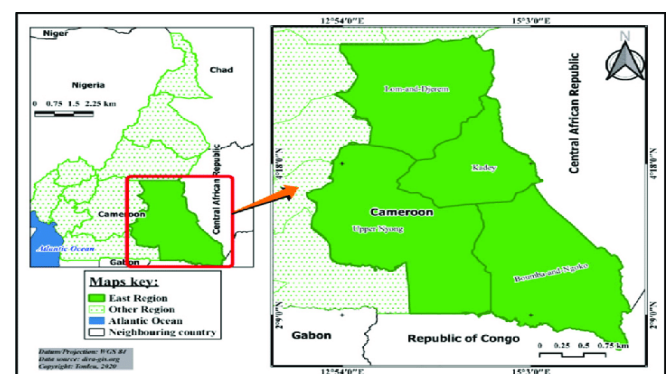
assistance of refugees in Cameroon by Kourouma (1983) begins by analyzing what she quoted as "The norms of protection and assistance to African Refugees". Relating to the 1951 Geneva Convention, its 1967 protocol, the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) convention and special roles played by specialized agencies of the United Nations to protect and provide a framework for refugee integration in Cameroon, gave this study the impetus to conclude that most of the basic need of Central African Republic refugees just like that of every human being is primarily important to take into consideration while formulating integration policies.

This paper which demonstrated that Cameroon has a long-standing history of hosting refugees and is among the largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa, provides guidance for those seeking to address refugee problems worldwide. The paper treats the background of the refugee crisis in East Cameroon, examines the causes for their influx from Central African Republic, highlights Cameroon's government responses to the refugees' problems and security threats posed by their presence, tackles the challenges encountered, and outlines policy recommendations to the Cameroon government, Central African Republic government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Finally, it ends with a conclusion that provides a model for the prevention and resolution of challenges associated with refugee's crisis and security challenges in the East Region of Cameroon.

2. Background

The East Region occupies the southeastern portion of the Republic of Cameroon. It is bordered to the east by the Central African Republic, to the south by Congo, to the north by the Adamawa Region, and to the west by the Centre and South Regions (See Map 1). With 109,002 km² of territory, it is the largest region in the nation as well as the most sparsely populated. Historically, the peoples of the East have been settled in Cameroonian territory longer than any other of the country's many ethnic groups, the first inhabitants being the Baka pygmies.

Map 1: East Region of Cameroon



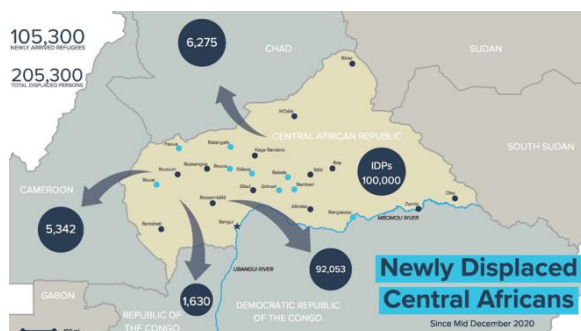
Source: Kidmo et als. (2021: 782).

The East Region of Cameroon, bordering the Central African Republic, has a history shaped by post-independence development and the ongoing impact of the Central African Republic refugee crisis. Geographically, it's a region of mixed terrain and climate,

with significant resource potential and vulnerability to conflicts and displacement. The East Region is diverse, with forested areas, wetlands, and access to the Central African Republic border. This geographical feature, while providing potential for resource extraction and trade, also makes it vulnerable to cross-border conflict and instability. A major historical event is the arrival of refugees from the Central African Republic, particularly in the wake of the 2012-2013 violence. Cameroon, particularly the East Region, has been a major host country for Central African Republic refugees, with over 6,000 fleeing to the region after the resurgence of the conflict in 2021. After Cameroon gained independence in 1961, the boundaries of the East Region were finalized, with the capital later moved from Doumé to Bertoua in 1972. The region has seen limited development since independence, though there have been notable infrastructure projects like the extension of the railway from Yaoundé to Bêlabo.

The Central African Republic is a landlocked country located in the heart of Africa, bordering Chad, South Sudan, Sudan, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Cameroon (See Map 2). It is a diverse nation with a history marked by colonial rule and post-independence struggles, including a recent period of conflict and instability. The Central African Republic is a small landlocked country that has endured repeated cycles of violence since it gained independence from France more than 60 years ago. The current fighting is rooted in the 2013-2014 civil war, when the Muslim-majority Séléka group staged a coup against the Christian-majority government. President François Bozizé's government responded by creating the anti-Balaka militia to preserve his authority. While efforts to keep Bozizé in power proved futile, tensions escalated into a short but vicious civil war which ended in 2014. Elections were held the following year and in 2016, Faustin-Archange Touadera, who ran as an independent, took over from his former boss (whom Touadera had served as Prime Minister from 2008 to 2013). By then, Bozizé had already fled the country.

Map 2: Refugees Displaced in the Central African Republic



Source: Lamarche (2021).

This socio-economic and political situation in the Central African Republic has led to a long-term humanitarian and protection crisis characterized by widespread forced displacement, a fragile economy, and limited access to basic services. Gender inequalities and discrimination against specific groups continue. With a

population of approximately 6.1 million, the Central African Republic ranked 188th out of 191 countries in the 2022 Human Development Index. To further complicate the situation, 455,533 people are internally displaced, and approximately 676,000 remain refugees in neighbouring countries. A 2020 national census estimated that 1.1 million Central African Republic nationals are at risk of statelessness, underscoring the immense scale of the crisis and the pressing need for solutions. Central African Republic's crisis continues to be characterized by mass displacement, human rights violations, and disrupted services. Over 455,000 people are internally displaced, while some 704,000 Central African refugees are in asylum in neighbouring countries, including Cameroon, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Republic of Congo (RoC), Sudan and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2025: 2). Facilitated by a conducive legal framework and existing ties with local communities, Central African Republic refugees in Cameroon have found an environment in which the majority feels integrated (Barbelet, 2017b).

3. Causes of Influx of Refugees and Security Threats in the East Region

The East Region of Cameroon faces a complex humanitarian crisis stemming from both internal conflict and the influx of refugees, primarily from the Central African Republic. Political and sectarian violence in the Central African Republic, coupled with widespread instability, has driven many Central Africans to seek refuge in Cameroon. This influx, combined with existing security threats from rebel groups and armed bandits, creates a challenging environment for both refugees and the local population. The reasons responsible for the influx of refugees of the Central African Republic and existing security threats include the following.

3.1. Cameroon's Open-Door Policy and Geographical Proximity

Cameroon shares a border with the Central African Republic, making it a natural destination for those fleeing the violence. In principle, Cameroon is a conducive host environment for refugees (Crawford, 2015). The country operates an open-door policy and has ratified the major legal instruments for refugee protection, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Refugee Convention. These commitments have been translated into national law with a progressive legal framework allowing refugees to work, move freely and reside within its borders. Refugees could take Cameroon citizenship, although none of them succeeded due to the costs and complicated procedures involved (US Department of State, 2014). In principle, refugees have free access to primary healthcare and education, as well as a range of assistance from the UNHCR and other agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP), the Cameroonian Red Cross and international NGOs, including registration and documentation, food assistance, access to water and sanitation at refugee sites and limited livelihoods support. De facto local integration appears to be the norm. That explains why very few of the Central African Republic refugees from the first wave of displacement in particular did not anticipate returning to the

Central African Republic (Omata, 2013). In addition, beyond the legal framework, Central African refugees have longstanding ties with East Cameroon through geography, shared ethnicity, language and religion, reinforced by economic and family relations. The Central African Republic is heavily reliant on goods from Cameroon, and there is substantial trade and commercial exchange across the border. Marriage between Central Africans and Cameroonians is common, and many Central Africans have relatives who have sought refuge in Cameroon during past crises. Cameroon shares a border with CAR, and open-door policy for the Central African refugees, makes Cameroon a natural destination for those fleeing the violence in the Central African Republic (UNHCR, 2016).

3.2. Political Instability and Conflict in the Central African Republic

The ongoing conflict in the Central African Republic, fueled by political and sectarian violence, has forced mass displacement of populations, leading to an influx of refugees into Cameroon. After a rebellion and the dissolution of the elected government in 2013, the ensuing instability heightened the need for peacekeeping troops in Central African Republic. In late 2013, France sent a peacekeeping force (Operation Sangaris), and the United Nations authorized the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic called *Mission Internationale de Soutien à la Centrafrique sous Conduite Africaine* (MISCA). In April 2014 the European Union (EU) also sent a small contingent of peacekeeping troops; they remained in the country for about a year. A new operation, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (*Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Centrafricaine*; MINUSCA), subsumed MISCA and previous United Nations missions; it became operational in September 2014. Operation Sangaris ended its mission and left the country in 2016. In 2017, as insecurity continued to plague the country, the UN extended MINUSCA's mandate and authorized an increase in the mission's troop levels. Over the last ten years, Cameroon has admitted tens of thousands of refugees fleeing violence in the Central African Republic. Most have settled outside camps, with 70% living in rural, peri-urban and urban areas of eastern Cameroon. With an increasing gap between funding and needs and a growing crisis with Nigerian refugees in northern Cameroon, supporting CAR refugees' self-reliance has become more urgent than ever.

3.3. Armed Groups and Banditry

The East Region of Cameroon also experiences security threats from rebel groups and armed bandits operating from the Central African Republic side of the border, posing risks to both refugees and local communities. Border porosity, limited territorial control, and weak state authority in remote zones beyond the capital have especially threatened border provinces as fragile and vulnerable areas in almost all Central African states. The emergence and activities of centrifugal movements, rebels and armed groups often remain outside the reach of state control, affecting neighbouring countries like Cameroon. The ability to cross borders has increased

the risk of a spillover of violence across neighbouring countries (Meyer, 2015: 3). The recent violent escalation of the conflict in the Central African Republic, following the rebellion of a coalition of armed groups under the name of Séléka, the violent coup d'état against then President François Bozizé and the emergence of mainly Christian self-defence militia to fight the predominantly Muslim rebels has led to the influx of Central African refugees posing risks to both refugees and local communities in Cameroon.

3.4. Cross-Border Criminal Activities

The porous borders and political instability in neighboring countries facilitate cross-border criminal activities, including arms and narcotics trafficking, further exacerbating security concerns. There is a serious risk of violence and instability spilling over borders and engulfing Cameroon, as long as the security situation in the Central African Republic remains unsettled. The Central African Republic crisis has a clear regional dimension. Due to the limited territorial reach of state authority and lacking control over borders and remote areas, Central African Republic's long instability has allowed the country to become a stronghold for ex-soldiers, mercenaries and armed groups from neighbouring conflicts. The country is located and embedded in a regional conflict arc, with Sudan, South Sudan and the DRC among its neighbours. Poorly policed or uncontrolled borders facilitate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across the border into neighbouring Cameroon.

3.5. Human Rights Violations

Refugees from Central African Republic have also experienced human rights violations in their home country, further compelling them to seek refuge in Cameroon. The Central African Republic's transhumance tradition complicates population movements, contributing to resource tensions. Some communities have been displaced for over a decade, and while returns are increasing, other areas remain insecure. Since 2021, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) have caused injuries and deaths. In 2023, UNHCR recorded over 32,800 protection incidents. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains pervasive, with women and girls disproportionately affected. Gender inequalities persist, with women and girls bearing a disproportionate burden and facing violence and early marriages. Poor education and health services mostly affect women, girls, and children (UNHCR, 2024). Since starting the voluntary repatriation program in 2017, 49,117 refugees, primarily from Cameroon, have returned to the Central African Republic, with 12,426 returning between January and September 2024. In addition, 3,378 people returned from Cameroon, Chad, and Sudan spontaneously or under adverse circumstances. These challenges, are coming, after they sought refuge in Cameroon.

4. Cameroon's Government Responses to the Influx of Refugees and Security Threats

Cameroon has responded to the influx of refugees and security threats from the Central African Republic through a combination of security measures, humanitarian assistance, and legal frameworks. The government has taken steps to secure borders,

establish refugee camps, and implement legal protections for refugees. Additionally, the government collaborates with international organizations like UNHCR and NGOs to provide assistance and support to refugees and host communities. Some government responses to refugees and security threats from the Central African Republic are analysed below.

4.1. Government Response through Refugee Policies and Laws

The preamble of Cameroon's Constitution states that "every person shall have the right to settle in any place and to move about freely, subject to the statutory provisions concerning public law and order, security and tranquility" (Constitution of Cameroon, 1996).¹ In that spirit, the Cameroon government signed the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, without reservation, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. In July 2005, Cameroon adopted a Law Defining the Legal Framework for Refugee Protection and the relevant decree followed in November 2011. The law applies the refugee definitions of both Conventions and prohibits refoulement of refugees "for reasons other than national security and public order, pursuant to a lawful decision, and with 72-hour notice to UNHCR" (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009). Article 7 of the law states that "no person shall be turned back at the border ... to return to a territory where that person's life, bodily integrity or freedom would be threatened." There have been some cases of refoulement but there has not been systematic governmental harassment or serious physical risk (Ibid.).

4.2. Humanitarian Response

The State of Cameroon is the main actor concerned. Military measures have been taken to secure the borders with the Central African Republic and Nigeria, and camps have also been converted for refugees. New units were created in the army in 2013 and a significant material and human effort deployed in the eastern, northern and far northern regions. The Army watches over the borders and covers the entire zone in order to neutralise Islamist insurgents. A Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is operating in the Lake Chad basin zone. On the humanitarian front, land was allocated for refugee camps. An ad hoc inter-ministerial committee has been put in place to manage emergency situations concerning refugees in Cameroon. Governmental resources have also been distributed to all of the clusters at work. There are, of course, difficulties linked to insecurity. In the same way, instability in the Central African Republic influences the humanitarian response, since Central African refugees in Cameroon have no way of returning to a country where they would be difficult to protect.

¹ *Constitution of Cameroon (1996). Law n° 96/06 of January 18, 1996. The current Constitution of Cameroon is the Law n° 96/06 of January 18, 1996, which revised the 1972 Constitution and was subsequently amended by Law n° 2008/001 of April 14, 2008. It outlines the framework for Cameroon's government, including the presidency, parliament, and judiciary. The Constitution establishes the Republic of Cameroon as a decentralized unitary State, guaranteeing individual rights and freedoms*

This situation maintains the pressure on available resources. The attacks perpetrated on Cameroonian soil by armed Central African groups do not make humanitarian professionals' work easier. It is indeed difficult for them to cover all the zones undergoing periods of combat. Since the insurgents are mixed in with the inhabitants, there is a high risk of getting ambushed or caught in cross-fire, even though the army is working to protect humanitarian actors.

4.3. Institutional framework in Cameroon

The institutional framework in Cameroon is regulated by the Freedom of Association Act of December 19, 1990 and by the regulations concerning non-governmental organizations of December 22, 1999. Certain dispositions nevertheless act as barriers limiting access to financial resources and thereby weakening organizations and their capacity to undertake constructive initiatives. In addition, as we have already mentioned, local organizations identified by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are in a sub-contracting position relative to UN organizations. Granting some of them recognition as associations of public interest would contribute to sustainably consolidating knowledge, granting value to experience, and gradually building up the dynamics of a national humanitarian response.

4.4. Government Response through Partners

UNHCR works in collaboration with certain ministries in Cameroon. In addition to reinforcing the capacities of the Secretariat Technique (Government counterpart) in handling refugee matters, UNHCR collaborates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX), the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT), the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB), the Ministry of Defense (MINDEF), the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family (MINPROFF), the Ministry of Justice (MINJUSTICE), the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFEF), Ministry of environment Protection (MINEP), Ministry of Decentralization and Local Development (MINDDEVEL), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and other government institutions.

4.5. Government Response through Local Integration

The Government of Cameroon and its citizens have welcomed refugees from other countries in the region, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Liberia. In 2012, the number of Central African Republic refugees in Cameroon was approximately 92,000. With a second wave starting in March 2013, the number of Central African Republic refugees had increased by 50 percent within a year and they continue to flow in (U.S. Department of State, 2014). The degree of integration varies. At the highest levels, the Government of Cameroon provides protection through the allocation of land for refugee sites and allows refugees to access education and health services, but has not indicated any interest in facilitating their naturalization. At the

regional, and village levels, the attitudes vary greatly by individuals (Kuhlman, 1990). For example, some governors show great concern for refugees while others prefer to stop the refugees from coming to Cameroon. Among village chiefs, some offer land generously to the refugees, while others are cautious about the amount and location of the public land that is made available to the refugees (Ibid.). The Government of Cameroon believes that concentrating the refugees at designated sites is necessary for security reasons and to efficiently and effectively provide emergency response. The short-term plan is to stabilize their health, orient them to school, and build capacity in agriculture and other income-generating activities (Ager and Strang, 2004).

4.6. Government Commitments to Support Refugees

The government of Cameroon made additional commitments to support refugees within its borders. At the 2016 Leaders' Summit on Refugees and Migrants, Cameroon pledged to improve access to primary and higher education, strengthen the process of providing biometric ID cards, and facilitate voluntary returns for refugees. In March 2017, the government signed the Tripartite Agreement with the government of Nigeria and UNHCR outlining modalities of voluntary return of refugees to Nigeria. This agreement resulted from over two years of advocacy by UNHCR and the broader humanitarian community in Cameroon to curtail forced returns of Nigerian and Central African refugees. The tripartite commission, which oversees its implementation, first met in August 2017. In addition, the government issued a Letter of Development Policy in August 2017, in which it requested financing from the IDA18 sub-window and articulated the government's commitment to move toward a long-term strategic approach to forced displacement. The government committed to prepare a medium-term strategy to manage refugees, facilitating greater access to basic social services for vulnerable populations affected by forced displacement, improving legal security for refugees, issuing biometric and travel documents for refugees, and issuing birth certificates for children of refugees born in Cameroon. The Central African Republic refugees living in camps and in host communities can register and be recognized as refugees, and have access to health and education services on the same basis as Cameroonian nationals in these areas (Mberu and Pongou, 2012).

4.7. Forced Returns of Refugees

Forced returns of Nigerian refugees continue in the Far North, in violation of policy commitments and international humanitarian law. This practice has not been reported for Central African Republic refugees in the North, East, or Adamawa regions. Although the exact number of forced returns are unknown even to specialists, there is consensus that the volume of forced returns has decreased in recent years, especially since late 2017, around the time UNHCR made public statements criticizing the practice (Musa and Oludare, 2017). Nevertheless, public scrutiny has not put an end to forced returns at the Cameroon-Nigerian border, and the situation remains complex and fluid. In January 2019, UNHCR reported that over 9,000 refugees were forcibly returned to Nigeria after fleeing an attack on a Nigerian border town (UNHCR, 2019).

5. Challenges Posed by the Influx of Refugees and Security Threats in East Cameroon

The influx of Central African Republic refugees and insecurity present significant threats in the East Region of Cameroon. This has affected both the refugees themselves and the local population. The main challenges include limited access to basic services like education and healthcare, food insecurity, the risk of human rights violations, the need for assistance and protection for displaced populations, and the strain on already limited resources. Furthermore, the security situation, including acts of violence and the presence of armed groups, creates an environment of fear and instability. In addition to these challenges, the East region of Cameroon also faces the impact of natural disasters, such as floods and droughts, which further strain the region's resources and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. The following challenges have been identified.

5.1. Challenges Linked to Cameroon's Refugee Response Structure

Despite two decades of experience with forced displacement, coordination at the central government level for meeting displaced people's needs remains disjointed (Barbelet, 2017c: 20). MINAT is the focal ministry for humanitarian affairs and plays a central role in the government's management of refugees in rural areas through local government representatives, governors, or *prefets* and *sous-prefets*. However, refugee issues, including status determination, are managed separately by a technical secretariat within MINREX. The provision of identity documents for all residents of Cameroon, including refugees, is managed by a separate structure, the Directorate of National Security (*Délégation Générale à la Sureté Nationale* [DGSN]), a security body that reports directly to the president. Matters related to development, including all World Bank projects, are managed by yet another ministry, Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Territorial Administration (*Ministère de l'Economie, de la Planification et de l'Amenagement du Territoire* [MINEPAT]). Overall, it appears there is no clear institutional arrangement to manage a medium- or long-term response to forced displacement as responsibilities either overlap among or are lost between ministries (World Bank, 2018). Institutions and NGOs working in both humanitarian and development sectors report fruitful coordination with local authorities and greater challenges coordinating at the central level.

5.2. Challenges Linked to Insecurity

Despite the efficacy of the military response, the East region remains one of the most dangerous part of Cameroon. Instability in the Central African Republic influences the humanitarian response, since Central African refugees in Cameroon have no way of returning to a country where they would be difficult to protect. This situation maintains the pressure on available resources. The attacks perpetrated on Cameroonian soil by armed Central African groups do not make humanitarian professionals' work easier. It is indeed difficult for them to cover all the zones undergoing periods of combat. Since the insurgents are mixed in with the inhabitants,

there is a high risk of getting ambushed or caught in cross-fire, even though the army is working to protect humanitarian actors.

5.3. Challenges Linked to Food Insecurity

Food insecurity also aggravates the situation in the East Region of Cameroon. The extreme poverty of this host region does not allow them to withstand the pressure exerted on the resources which are available. The humanitarian response there not only concerns refugees and internally displaced persons, but must also take into account the local inhabitants who consent to sharing their very meagre resources. Often incapable of cultivating their fields due to acts of violence by armed rebels, while a number of them are exposed to famine.

5.4. Challenges Associated with Funding and Accountability

The funding associated to refugee crisis is notoriously insufficient. The humanitarian response required 282.2 million dollars in 2016. Yet the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) confirmed on July 19, 2016 that funding amounted to 62.4 million. Calls for international mobilisation were issued by Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator for OCHA, and Najat Rochdi, Coordinator of the UN System in Cameroon, to engage sponsors to recognise the imperative of supporting the humanitarian response (Mengo, 2016: 83). The projects funded by the IDA18 refugee sub-window represent an attempt to create incentives for governments to invest in the development of long-neglected areas. While humanitarians lack clear mechanisms to hold governments accountable to their own policy commitments, the conditionality of the IDA18 sub-window financing could provide leverage to encourage the Cameroon government to live up to its protection commitments. Successfully leveraging the sub-window requires the World Bank work with UNHCR and other partners to clearly define the condition of "a sufficient protection framework" and for the World Bank to be willing to hold funding until this condition is met. Indeed, the World Bank has already indicated its willingness to do this, and has delayed the sign-off on and paused project agreements in response to reports of forced returns. This may strain relationships and directly challenge the government, conflicting with the World Bank's traditional approach of implementing programs in close cooperation with its government partners. However, if the government does not perceive the threat of withdrawing or holding-up financing as credible, it has little to lose by neglecting its commitments to protect and improve the lives of refugees, host communities and others affected by displacement. Additionally, since 2017, government security forces have perpetrated violence against civilians and contributed to the displacement of over 360,000 IDPs in the Northwest and Southwest regions (Human Rights Watch, 2018). These areas and populations are not intended beneficiaries of projects funded by the IDA18 sub-window, but the World Bank should decide if the condition of maintaining a sufficient protection framework is violated by government security forces engaging in violence against civilians that results in displacement (UNCHR, 2019).

5.5. Obstacles to Birth Registration and Bribery

Once on Cameroonian soil, Central African Republic refugees are registered by UNHCR and are issued identity card that allows them to have access to available social services. The challenge faced by these refugees is the non-recognition of their identity cards by some Cameroonian police and administrative authorities. This situation makes it difficult for the Central African Republic refugees to move freely, instead, they must have an additional document entitled "To Whom It May Concern" issued by the heads of UNHCR offices. Since the UNHCR offices are not located in all the refugee's host communities, the refugees must travel to obtain the document which requires cost. Consequently, police often demand bribes from these groups of persons and even their citizens at different control posts (Sehngwi, 2014: 56). This makes road travel time consuming, costly, violent and fatal confrontations at such checkpoints, consequently increasing the risks of arbitrary detention. In this light, Robert Afuh mention that "law enforcement officers in Cameroon who are unaware of refugee law in general and the principle of "non-refoulement" in particular send back refugees across the border" (Tayimlong, 2013: 114). Obstacles to birth registration include the remoteness of some populations from the civil registration centers, a lack of awareness about documentation, the high cost of obtaining court declaration for births registration after the legal deadline of 6 months as well as capacity and resource constraints that limit their access to the relevant services.

5.6. Corruption Practices

One of the greatest obstacles to the effective integration of Central African Republic refugees in Cameroon comes from corruption practices which is seen as a "canker-worm" that has eaten deeply into Cameroonian society as the option of living a sustainable life (Sehngwi, 2014: 58). In the legal context, corruption refers to a wrongful desire to acquire or cause some pecuniary or other advantages. It encompasses a variety of wrongful acts such as among others bribery, kickbacks, jury tampering and abuse of public office. Corruption has been called "Cameroon's worst-kept secret" (Reuters, 2014). The corruptibly quest for money and properties in Cameroon hindered the smooth integration of Central African Republic refugees and contribute heavily to my conclusion here that the Refugee policy frameworks are not fully implemented in Cameroon.

5.7. Xenophobia and Hate Speech

Xenophobia and hate speech toward Central African Republic refugees within the host communities in the East Region of Cameroon were some of the obstacles which posed a serious threat to their smooth integration caused by inexperience and the inability of the Cameroon government to accept refugees and other non-nationals. This was as a result of the confusion created in differentiating refugees from other foreign immigrants, the numerous perennial attacks orchestrated by rebel groups within the host and border communities and the economic impoverishment of the majority of indigenes. These and their increasing numbers give the impression to the host population that the Central African Republic refugees were mounting pressure on their limited

resources and other amenities provided by the government and implementing humanitarian partners. In fact, the negative effects of xenophobia that subjected Central African Republic refugees to discrimination and hate speech, portrayed as a burden and parasitic agent to Cameroon and their local communities (Hook and Eagle, 2002).

5.8. Educational Challenges

Educational challenges worked against the effective integration policy within the context of Central African Republic refugees in Cameroon. The educational attainment rates of Central African Republic refugees in Cameroon were generally lower than the national standards. It was especially challenging for the staff of UNESCO and UNHCR to fully include Central African Republic refugees in the educational framework in Cameroon. The increasing presence of refugees and IDPs created a situation where the student-teacher ratio of 1:80-100 was far above the national standard of 1:53. The ratio of teacher-students rose to 1:300 in certain camps in the East region hosting Central African Republic refugees. The number of school kits that were provided to the pupils and the teaching-learning aids were limited (World Food Programme and UNHCR, 2016).

5.9. Insufficient Funding

The insufficient funding was the greatest barrier to integration strategies given that the preview drafted funding to assist person of needs by the Cameroon government are always limited and never provided infinitive to reduce the heavy burden on the villages and host communities that share their resources together. In 2015, out of US\$ 331,193,888 requested to assist Central African Republic refugee's situation within the host countries in Cameroon, only about 25 per cent of the funds were received amounting to US\$ 83,657,477 (CAR Regional Refugee Response Plan, 2016: 3).² Not only that but also, while humanitarian funding for refugees within Cameroon is dwindling despite persistent needs, only 19.5 per cent of Cameroon's Humanitarian Response Plan in 2018, for refugees was met out of 45 per cent required (Ibid., 2019: 6). Notably, in 2018, the World Food Programme reduced by half the number of people receiving monthly food rations due to budget shortage. As such, much still have to be done to close this gap thus, limiting the effective implementation of integration policy towards Central African Republic refugees in Cameroon (World Food Programme and UNHCR, 2016).

6. Policy Recommendations

To address the challenges caused by the influx of Central African refugees and security threats in Cameroon, policy

recommendations focus on strengthening legal migration, promoting inclusive social protection, and empowering youth and women. These measures, coupled with improved border governance and humanitarian assistance, aim to ensure safe and dignified conditions for both refugees and host communities.

6.1. The Government of Cameroon should:

- Create a new office and appoint a focal point for the government's response to forced displacement to strengthen coordination between ministries and agencies and with non-government partners.
- Include refugees in national development plans, and measure progress of refugee populations towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in its voluntary national reviews.
- Create a task force of relevant government agencies and ministries and development and humanitarian partners to support implementation and provide oversight of policies and programs.
- Increase the capacity of the National Bureau of Civil Status (BUNEC) to provide birth certificates to children of refugees born in Cameroon by opening and staffing new offices in refugee hosting areas.
- Facilitate safe and dignified voluntary repatriation for refugees who wish to return to their home countries, and support resettlement options for those who cannot return.
- Ensure that refugees have equal access to social and economic opportunities, including employment, education, and healthcare, and are treated with dignity and respect

6.2. The Government of the Central African Republic should:

- Work with Cameroon to establish clear channels for the registration and documentation of refugees.
- Regularly share information on the situation within Central African Republic with Cameroon, including security updates and potential refugee flows.
- Coordinate humanitarian aid efforts with Cameroon to ensure effective delivery of assistance to refugees and host communities.
- Provide financial and technical support to Cameroonian host communities to help them cope with the influx of refugees.
- Encourage and support the voluntary return of refugees to Central African Republic when conditions permit, ensuring safe and dignified returns.
- Increase the deployment of security forces, facilitate dialogue and negotiations between the government and armed groups to find peaceful resolutions.

6.3. The UNHCR should:

- Ensure all refugees in the East Region of Cameroon are registered and receive necessary documentation to access services and rights, including land and housing rights.

² The 2016 Central African Republic Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) aims to outline the strategy for providing protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees and impacted host communities. It also seeks to promote the transition from emergency assistance to more durable solutions by providing a common ground to advocate for support of national development plans and the stronger involvement of development actors in the region.

- Empower local communities to become active participants in protection efforts by engaging traditional authorities, social workers, and community support structures.
- Implement specific programs to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, which disproportionately affects refugee women and girls.
- Ensure that refugees have access to safe and dignified shelter, adequate water and sanitation facilities, and essential services like healthcare and education.
- Advocate for the government to adopt and implement national legislation that aligns with international refugee law and provides for the protection of refugees and other displaced persons.
- Work with the government and other stakeholders to promote durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation when safe and sustainable, local integration, and resettlement

7. CONCLUSION

The study has argued that the influx of Central African refugees into the East Region of Cameroon and the related security threats represent a complex humanitarian and security challenge to Cameroonians. While Cameroon has a history of hospitality, the increasing numbers of refugees, coupled with internal conflicts, strain its resources and exacerbate existing security issues. Government responses, are often inadequate due to limited resources and political constraints. Facilitated by a conducive legal framework and existing ties with local communities, Central African Republic refugees in Cameroon have found an environment in which the majority feels integrated. However, many struggle to sustain themselves. Their influx into the East Region of Cameroon has created security risks, including potential for criminal activities, clashes between refugees and local communities, and the possibility of refugee camps being used as bases for armed groups. Development-led approaches to the forced displacement and refugee crisis in Cameroon are promising. UNHCR and World Bank-funded projects could make significant improvements in the lives of refugees and host communities and support Cameroon's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

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